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CAN WRONG BE RIGHT?

VOL. I.

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NEW-STREET SQUARE

CAN WRONG BE RIGHT?

A TALE.

BY MRS. S. C. HALL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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Dedication

I INSCRIBE THESE VOLUMES TO THE

GUIDE, THE COUNSELLOR, THE UNCHANGING AFFECTIONATE

FRIEND, THE DEVOTED HUSBAND, WHO FOR FIVE-AND-THIRTY

YEARS HAS LABOURED FOR ME, AND WITH ME: TO WHOSE CARE AND

JUDGMENT I OWE WHATEVER SUCCESS I HAVE ACHIEVED, AND

FROM WHOSE EXAMPLE I HAVE LEARNED TO VALUE THE

DIGNITY AND HAPPINESS OF WORK.

A. M. H.

Bannow Lodge,
Boltons, West Brompton.

CAN WRONG BE RIGHT?

CHAPTER I.

THIS, which I write for you, my own beloved Mary, shall be "the truth, the whole truth—and nothing but the truth!"

Hold!—I have promised too much:—unless, indeed, I write with an iron pen; and record the trembling weaknesses, the pitiful suggestions, the terrible deceptions —worse, far worse than these—unless I record them all, I have promised too much!"

My Mary, it is often difficult and hazardous to tell the plain unvarnished truth of others; how then is it possible to see

it in all its bearings, to divest it of all its coverings, to conceal nothing of its actual form and character, — and tell it of ourselves !

Yes; I have promised too much! yet I have become fearless and bold — my age is stronger than was my youth — and I will test its strength — for the bravest work ever achieved by pen is to write honestly, without dread and without reserve, the story of a life.

Yes, Mary, I have promised too much; but I will firmly and faithfully endeavour to keep my written word. I am no longer the slave of passion; yet the memory of the burning sirocco that withered my youth, and drove me to the verge of insanity — even now, I say, the memory of my earnest, passion-full youth, thrills my blood, and binds again a scorching circle round my brow ! — ! Enough — the story will teach you — I will not anticipate; when you have read it to the end, if you

derive no lesson from it, I shall, indeed, have written in vain!

My mother died within an hour after she had given me birth, and I became the care of my father's mother, who left her own cottage to reside with her wifeless son.

You must go back with me some sixty years, and hear the villagers say, that little Mildred Kennett, the schoolmaster's daughter, is growing bonny, and that old dame Kennett has nursed her tenderly — if not wisely!

I was that little "Mildred Kennett" — the village schoolmaster was my father, and "old dame Kennett" my grandmother. I never heard that my father was what is called "well descended," but his perseverance and natural ability made him a scholar — so much so, that after the dismissal of his village pupils at four o'clock, he used to go up to Brecken Hall, to read with the young heir and help on his

education — as his Lady Mother would not let him go to school before entering college, and no tutor could be found to remain long in the house with so imperious a dame and so wilful a pupil. She was only his mother by law, his father's second wife — but, as he was only two years old when she received him from his nurse, and had no children of her own, it was believed she loved him much; at all events she made great parade of affection.

I do not know what my father taught, but the gentry of the county, and the heir's guardians (for he was an orphan), protested against the mode of education his stepmother adopted, and said it was a shame to consign him to the charge of a mere village teacher; the lady, however, was for a time resolute in her will, and it so chanced that her son's inclination ran the same way. My father was mild, yet firm, and, though peasant-born, of a dignified

manner, and had withal so prepossessing a countenance, that the roughest children were led captive by his looks. The lady, indeed, wished him to give up his school and reside altogether at the Hall — (it was before my birth); but my father had a bird in his nest that he loved far more than what is called "advancement;" he also loved his independence, and declined the honour with many thanks. But the proud lady was offended — persons of her estate can ill brook being thwarted in what they consider for the advantage of those they patronise, and yield anything rather than free will. When my father went at the usual hour, the servant told him his attendance was no longer required. He turned away with a flushed cheek; but before he had descended the steps of the stately Hall, the wilful boy clung round his neck, and demanded that he should immediately return. That he refused to do, and a painful scene ensued

between mother and child — the lady reproaching my father with having robbed her of her son's affections, and the boy retorting insolently — telling his mother he would have his way and will, for he was master there — and would prove it. Poor lady! she lacked true dignity, for she would argue with the youth, before my father, how *that* was *her* dower house, and how *she* could turn him out if she pleased — as it was HERS, her own until her death. But when her passion evaporated, her pride yielded; and the next morning brought my father a note, saying he might resume his lessons. The permission was declined. A request followed, with no other result. A few days afterwards the lady sent for the young heir's guardians, and — appealing to their authority, which she herself had taught him to despise — determined on his being sent to Eton. Of course all this made much noise in the village; some blamed my father, while

others declared he had behaved with manly firmness that did him honour. Still, those who sought favour from the lady of Brecken Hall withdrew their children from the school; but his reputation as a teacher had been so enhanced by the fact of his having been engaged to instruct the young heir, that a sufficient number remained to employ his time and provide for his necessities. To do the lady justice, she never seemed to wish to injure my father, and after my mother's death, condescended to hope he was bearing his affliction as became a Christian.

Years passed on. The young heir seldom came to the Hall — an unhappy feeling grew into unnatural strength between him and his mother: and at length the lady became so hard and bitter, that she was avoided by rich and poor. I remember my grandmother once leading me out of church by the hand — she certainly took delight in making the most of her

grandchild's natural advantages—when, as the villagers divided, the women curtsying, and the men bowing and bareheaded, as "the Lady," stern and observant, passed from the church porch to her carriage, striking the stones with her gold-headed crutch, in seeming contempt of what she trod upon — she suddenly paused, and, fixing her eyes on me, said, "I suppose that is the schoolmaster's little girl?"

I felt as if the look that accompanied the question withered me, as a sapling is shrivelled by a blast.

My grandmother tightened my hand within hers and curtsied her reply; not meekly; my father inherited her spirit. It was brave but not presumptuous: the spirit of conscious rectitude: ever as far apart from arrogance as it is from servility.

"Then," said the cruel woman, "sear her face with a red-hot iron; your father's learning, child, will tell you what English queen was so served, and that precedent

will please his scholarship. Sear her face, it is too fair for the station in life to which it has pleased God to call her."

"Lady," answered the proud peasant woman; "the God who bestowed fairness on the child, will allot to her the station she is to fill in life!"

CHAPTER II.

My childhood passed in the light of the softest and purest sunshine that ever fell upon a child. Whatever my father knew he poured into my mind with loving and lavish thought. It was not the knowledge that a girl needs most; but, happily for myself, I had a feminine longing for what is, and always must be, womanly and graceful—a desire to teach my needle cunning crafts in white and coloured embroideries. I have walked many miles to learn a new stitch, and the village tailor and dressmaker not only kept me all their scraps of cloth, and silk and velvet, but begged wherever they could what would give me pleasure; and before I was twelve years old I copied flowers from nature in

those materials, with the aid of my scissors and needle, as accurately as I did in after years with brush and pencil. I had wonderful delight in seeking flowers in bush and brake for that purpose. My grandmother used to rail against the time I lost in this pursuit; but my wiser father said, "Leave Mildred alone, good mother; I would give every girl a pursuit, a trade,—yes, I would to the highest lady give what she could proudly rest upon, and say, 'By *this* I can live—*this* art can save me, if the world goes mad, as it has often done, hurling the mighty from their seats, and leaving them to starve or labour; by THIS I can stand, and save myself from the degradation of want or dependence.' My child has the inheritance of toil, but if she is perfected in this craft, that toil will not be in the field or in service."

The wandering after wild flowers brought me more closely and reverently acquainted with Nature than those can ever be who

pluck a blossom only to cast to earth that which beautifies and blesses it. I have risen often in the spring-time before day to seek some far-away plot of lily of the valley, or wild crocus, or variegated orchid, or particular primrose. The bindweed was my delight. I have gathered its trails from the green grass, and trembled with pleasure while plucking its festoons from luxuriant hedges—the white, the striped, the pink, the purple,—how I loved them! how I love them still!

How I have prayed to be able to copy a harebell; I could imitate its shape and colour, but no art of mine could transfix the delicacy of the tint, the transparent lightness of the bell, through which you can almost see the atmosphere. It seemed an ethereal flower, dropped by an angel's hand. It was my great impossibility; I could not copy it. I used to weep over it, and resolve never to gather another. The fritillaria led me into many a marsh; I

have gathered a basketful of that and the daffodil, so that I might return in time to prepare breakfast for those I loved—I then thought — as fervently as I *could* love anything beneath the sun.

Do not weary of me and my wild flowers, Mary.

The love of flowers, as you know, is a passion with me still; it was ever a pleasure beyond expression to gather them and paint them. They are my dial of early memories. I could even now point out the spot where, in my childhood, I first gathered any particular bloom.

When my house labour was finished I would take my frame and my flowers, and work and sing under the shadow of an old mulberry-tree at the end of our garden, which sheltered a knoll that commanded a view of the downs, and of a long line of wood leading to Brecken Hall; the high-road ran along the bank of a stream, deep and swift in the hollow, for above a mile.

Many a water-lily have I gathered from that stream.

Little Mildred Kennett was becoming famous; ladies called in their carriages to see and purchase her work, and often brought exotics from their conservatories for her to group and copy. They would occasionally take me to their homes and permit me to select the flowers; the wife of the clergyman invited me to teach her daughter; and when my father came for me, the vicar would have him into the parlour, and they would talk grandly about old poets, or theology, or great saints and martyrs, or something I longed to understand in mathematics. The vicar was kind and benevolent, but he never heard tell of a new thing without turning to his wife and saying:—

"There, now, Jane, my dear, you know I thought of *that* a week ago; I cannot imagine how it is that every idea of mine gets wind before I find time to work it. I

told my wife, Master Kennett, of that plan of lowering water more rapidly at the weirs, and, in less than a month, I saw the self-same plan in the county paper." I never went there, but I heard how he had thought of something which had been caught up by members of Parliament, or by book-makers, or by the Commander-in-Chief, or First Lord of the Admiralty, before he "had time" to make it known! I remember thinking what a wonderful man he must be, and telling my father so; while he laughed and said "Yes, he had 'wonderful imagination.'" I invented a new stitch, and I flew to show it to "the Madam," as we called the vicar's wife; but the vicar must needs inspect my handywork.

"Well done, little Milly!" he exclaimed; "like the rest of the world you have caught my idea. Jane, my love, you remember what I said about colour?—*here* is the effect!"

I remember falling into a passion of tears at this, without being able to define why. I shall never forget how ashamed I felt — either for the vicar or of myself; and when I told my father, his quaint smile curled his lip a little, and he answered —

"Ah, dear, I told you he had wonderful imagination, and the Madam believes in him."

I never took another new stitch to the Vicarage, but had frequent opportunities of being there, and they were all so kind to me; sometimes I had to stay with the young ladies; and the vicar would read to us while we worked, selecting passages from old poets that thrilled me with enjoyment. Sometimes he would lend my father a sage book which prevented his walking with me, or talking to me, for a week, for he read slowly and thoughtfully, making notes. After the book was borrowed, or after it was returned, invariably we had cake and cowslip wine, and the vicar's wife

always sent a large slice of the cake to my grandmother. Once she told me I was to be sure not to eat it by the way. I coloured, and laid it on the table. "If you think, Madam, I *could* do that, I would rather not ——"

"What, Mildred?" she inquired, for I feared my father would be displeased if I finished the sentence.

"I would rather not come here again," I said in an under tone.

"You have no right, Mildred, to be so hasty, or so proud," — but though the kind lady sent many slices of cake, more tempting still, after that to my grandmother, she never repeated her warning to me.

You will think that the schoolmaster's daughter was what is called "spoiled." I was wilful, and full of a rambling but intense enthusiasm — now delighting in a flower, now in a poem. I never saw the sun rise or set without emotion; and the first song of the thrush, or whistle of the

blackbird, the coo of the woodpigeon, or spring-shout of the cuckoo, would throw me into a flood of tears; I have thrilled at the sight of a tiger-lily or a dazzling cactus. Judicious training might have directed and corrected all this. I believe that tenderness and affection, and even praise, fall like the dew of heaven upon the growing mind. I would rather over-praise than over-censure youth; but the conviction came upon me in after-life that I had needed guidance and mental restraint: my imagination overthrew my judgment.

I certainly knew I had no small share of personal attraction—the proud lady's scorn had taught me that—but all personal vanity evaporated in a higher and wilder, yet perfectly undefined, passion for the beautiful; doubtless, it is the ground from which great painters, and poets, and sculptors, spring to immortality. In those days I believed God's Power was His highest attribute—I, who afterwards bent, lowly as any woman could bend, in supplication for His Mercy!

I was seventeen when the old lady at the Hall died. We all expected the heir would have attended the funeral; but he was ill and abroad, so the ceremony was without a "chief mourner," or, indeed, a mourner of any kind. What an awful thing it was —a human being having lived for sixty-seven years in the midst of a ductile, simple people, prone, as our English people still are, to reverence ancestry — yes, sixty and seven years had she lived among them; but no tear hallowed the marble that closed over the earth her unsympathizing life had encumbered.

Yet one touch of nature sanctified her dying bed. Moving her finger to her attendant (a woman who had led a life of torture from her lady's caprice), — "Tell Oswald," she said, "that ——"

With a strong effort she pressed her cold, rigid palms one against the other, raised them to heaven — and died while she murmured a prayer for "Oswald."

CHAPTER III.

After the grim old lady's death, Brecken Hall was even more closely shut up than it had been during the last ten years of her life. Flying rumours swept from time to time through the country, that "Sir Oswald was coming home;" that "Sir Oswald was going to be married;" that "Sir Oswald was squandering money on pictures and books;" that "Sir Oswald's horse had won the gold cup at some race abroad." At all these rumours my father smiled, saying simply, "We shall see!" At last a lady came to our end of the county, who made the village forget even "Sir Oswald." That lady was Miss Mansfeld, a beauty and an heiress—of an old "county family," who would possess about four thousand

pounds a year; indeed, though her parents were alive, she might be said to have that fortune already, for they but lived to do her will.

Mr. and Mrs. Mansfeld had seen their children one by one drop around them into early graves, and when only Caroline was left, they took her abroad — to Nice, to Rome, to Egypt — wintering here, and wandering there, until the physicians declared all danger over, and that she might fearlessly pass six months of the year in England.

Mansfeld Grange is five miles from our village; but there was so much talk about Miss Mansfeld's beauty, that all who could walk the ten miles deserted our parish church on Sundays, being seized with a sudden desire (they said) to hear the Vicar of Mansfeld preach. I also longed to see this paragon; but my father would not let me leave what he called "my church" on the Sabbath, and during

the week I had no spare time to wander so far. I was finishing a wreath of scarlet lilies for a lady who lived near Mansfeld Grange, and who needed them by a particular day; they were embroidered on black lutestring silk — I remember them well — I had the natural flowers before me in a vase — I would not take them to the mulberry-seat, because the sun shone upon it, and I feared their fading; so I sat at my own open window, which my dear father had made into a half-door, that I might have abundance of light; and the leaves and tendrils of a beautiful vine formed a framework round it, so that from the outside it looked like a bower. My various strips of silk were arranged on the sill; I was singing — as I always did — for I could not choose but sing; my song helped my work. The little grass-plat came right up to the window, and many a time have the robins answered my song, and sung with me from a standard rose-tree that was

greatly admired—it was tall and bushy, and covered with little thickly-leaved roses, not larger than hazel-nuts. I was so intent on my work, that I neither saw shadow, nor heard step, but started as the voice of a woman, not of a bird, joined in my song.

"I thought you never would look up," she said; "and now you need not be alarmed; I came to see your embroidery."

I knew it was Miss Mansfeld: she was dressed in a gray riding-habit of some material lighter than cloth, that fell in soft drapery on the sward; but instead of the man's hat and buckle worn at that time, her head-gear was a wide-brimmed silk hat of the same tone of colour as her habit, with two long drooping ostrich feathers.

In another moment she gathered up her drapery, and stept, or rather bounded, so lightly through the window, into the room, that she never disturbed my silks. She bent over my work so long, examining it leaf by leaf, thread by thread—having first

thrown off her hat—that I had ample time to gaze upon her beauty. Her brow was high and full; her head, neither large nor small, was gracefully placed upon her slender throat, and her waving hair of brilliant blackness was gathered into a pearl net at the back—hair and net falling over her shoulders.

Her features were exquisite in shape and size, but the eyes, dark and flashing when facing the light, had a tone of colour, a glitter, that I did not like to look at—a sort of greenish hazel: they were rapid and restless in their movements. Her mouth, then and ever, struck me as if formed to conceal thoughts, rather than mould ideas into words; it was too firm for a woman, too mobile for a man; a *tight* mouth, except when she smiled, and then mouth, eyes, every feature radiated in bewildering light and fascination; but her figure and its movements were more entrancing even than her face. I never saw

such grace, combined with what, in others, would have been abruptness: in her it was a rapid passing from one grace to another; her restlessness was almost painful, yet you would not have had her tranquil; all seemed, and was, unstudied; there was no more art in her movements than there is in the attitudes of a panther. I have written the name of a cruel, graceful, and beautiful animal: from the moment Miss Mansfeld bounded into my little chamber she was associated in my mind with all that was faithless and fascinating. She praised my taste and skill; she took my hands within her long and slender fingers, and said I must tell her how I had acquired so much power over the world of flowers.

She told me to open my heart to her. She asked me who taught me to braid my bright brown hair after the fashion of ancient Greece, and how I preserved the delicate fairness of my complexion in my half-peasant life. She said she thought we

were exactly of a height, and laid her light riding rod over both our heads to prove it; it felt like a bar of iron on my brain. Then she would measure waists; then ruffle like some foreign bird among my books, and turn over my patterns, proffering me a rich portfolio to preserve them, instead of the brown paper in which they were kept, speaking in a voice whose every tone was music, and flashing forth hints as to colour, and the marvels of light and shade, which, though carelessly and rapidly spoken, I gathered and treasured as jewels of knowledge. She promised, when I came to the Grange, she would show me pictures that would so improve my taste that I should quit their presence a new creature, "though that," she said, looking at me with an admiration of which I was ashamed, "would be a pity; she would not be my fairy godmother, and change me from what I was, for worlds." After loitering and lingering about my little room, and then waving

round it and round it with a soft, stealthy, cat-like step, as if she wanted to get out and could not, or to spring on something she desired to destroy, she suddenly expressed a wish to see my father. She had heard of him frequently, she said, from Sir Oswald Harvey, whom she knew abroad. Sir Oswald had never forgotten his dear old master. She bounded into the schoolroom, as she had done through my window, and took my father's hands in hers, as she had taken mine; she beguiled him from his high-backed chair, and dismissed the school, claiming a half-holiday for the boys, to give her welcome; then, drawing up her habit with one hand, she passed the other under my father's arm and led him to the mulberry seat, where she enthroned him — and there he was to tell her what a wilful, naughty boy Sir Oswald had been in his youth, and she would tell him what a wilful, naughty man he was now. My father was at once captivated; he had

cherished Sir Oswald's memory within his simple, earnest heart, and the assurance of being remembered by him imparted intense pleasure. My dear, dear father!

Ay, how truly like a panther the beautiful creature looked, crouching on the grass by his side! She forgot all about me, and my embroidery, in the delight of talking of Sir Oswald. My father attended her to the little gate ; she sprang into her saddle before the groom could offer his hand; and in a moment was cantering along the road to Brecken Hall.

"You should have seen her, Mildred," said my father, when seated beside me at my frame, thinking and talking only of Caroline Mansfeld: "you should have seen and heard her, when she gave me to understand—stay, I forget the words, but the meaning was, that Sir Oswald was coming home, and that—I really do not know how she put it, but it could be only interpreted that she was to be his wife. Now, Mildred,

do not look shocked. She did not say it in so many words; she let me suppose it—yes, that was it—she let me suppose it. She told me, too, how she admired you, and that she should like you to be with her at Brecken Hall. I do not think she meant as a servant, but as a companion."

"I would rather die, father, than be either the one or the other."

My father stared at my impetuosity; and well I remember flinging myself on his faithful, honest bosom, and bursting into a passion of tears, exclaiming that "I would *never* leave him—never!"

Why was all this? Whence arose this sudden and strong emotion?

CHAPTER IV.

I FINISHED my lilies, and took them to their home, but did not again receive either visit or message from Miss Mansfeld. It became positive torture to me, to hear my dear father say every morning—

"Well, Milly, are you doing anything very pretty? for I dare say we may see Miss Mansfeld to-day." My grandmother, who was not old, had grown prematurely infirm both in mind and body; but in some way she caught my feeling, and became irritable when my father praised the beautiful heiress. Dear grandmother! she would creep into my room and ask leave to sit with me, as if *she* were the child; and when I looked up from my embroidery to where she sat, with her Bible open,

on the little spider-table by her side, I always met the affectionate gaze of her deep blue eyes—and such a smile! so full of confiding and helpless affection.

Miss Mansfeld's approaching marriage with Sir Oswald was everywhere talked of; no one doubted it; Sir Oswald's arrival was expected daily. Brecken Hall had been delivered over to "improvements;" cases arrived from abroad, filled, it was said, with the marvels of France and Italy. Bricklayers had given way to decorators, and decorators to upholsterers. Sir Oswald, long ere this, had pensioned off the old servants; but they had not been replaced by new ones. The bride was to choose them. Even my father's little pupils brought news of the changes, and canvassed them in their small homes. I wondered if Sir Oswald would really become a blessing to the county; they said he was prompt and determined, but generous as a prince. Simple people believed that Sir Oswald Harvey

would redress all wrongs and establish all rights; but this was mere speculation. How could they know? My father was in an ecstacy: he delighted to recall all the little acts of affection and generosity which the boy-Baronet had bestowed upon his humble teacher; he lingered as fondly over the cherished remembrance of his beauty as the grey-haired widow over the miniature of the young husband of her youth. He had not relinquished the idea of Miss Mansfeld's visit, and the splendid order she was to give me.

"It will all be as I said," he would repeat; "Miss Mansfeld has waited to bring Sir Oswald with her—my dear old pupil! She has waited for that. It will be such a pleasure to see them together—such a couple!"

I had carried my work into the air, to my old seat; it was bright, bright sunshine,—but that could not injure white embroidery.

Remember, Mary, that my sheltering mulberry-tree in part overhung the road, which, for some twenty perches, had been excavated to render it more level; a wide footpath marked the original hill, and a green bank, overgrown with low brushwood and wild flowers, sloped up to our garden. As I sat, I saw the shadow of an arm of my tree traced out upon the white road; a heavily-laden van had passed slowly over it towards Brecken Hall; but the dust, though it soiled the herbage on the bank, never mounted so high as my seat; I was glad, however, when it was out of sight. Presently I heard a horse coming; it approached so leisurely that I imagined it must be one of the village dames returning from market. When it was within a few paces of the tree, I raised my eyes, and, sitting his horse with the firmness of an Englishman and the grace of an Arab, a stranger rode quietly onwards, restraining the impetuosity of his horse, without any

apparent effort, to the pace which the spirited creature desired to turn into a gallop. I had no power to move, or to withdraw my gaze. When the rider had nearly passed he looked up, and lifted his hat, as men who have profited by foreign travel usually do when they pass a woman. I saw his hand check the bridle, and he seemed about to ask a question; I trembled lest he should speak, for I could not have replied. He rode on; I grasped the rail of my seat with both hands, and, clinging to it, bent forward and looked after him. At almost the same moment he turned his head. I could have rejoiced, while sinking back, if the tree had opened and closed me in for ever; I felt ashamed of my forwardness—so humbled! What could the gentleman think? I, who was so quoted by mothers for my propriety; what possessed me to fix my eyes upon, and then gaze after him, —and he to see it! I sat for a long while, my work untouched, bewildered by

the new emotion that stirred within me, until at last I covered my burning cheeks with my trembling hands. I could not chronicle the time, but it seemed a day since he had vanished; the robin at my foot looked to me in vain for the accustomed crumbs. I heard my grandmother's voice calling in its sweet feebleness—"Mildred!" I knew she could not come to me, and I made no reply.

I had shrunk behind the tree, so that I should not be seen from the road; I heard my father's school-boys rushing past, tossing up their caps and hallooing in wild joyfulness, "Long live Sir Oswald Harvey!"

It was mid-day; school was over for the present, and my father would certainly seek me;—yes, now he called, and I must go.

From a child I had ever this feeling strong within me:—if I were in fault, however conscious that the fault was unknown, I felt as much ashamed in my

father's presence as if the wrong had been mapped out before him; it was the *self-knowledge* of my wrongfulness that humbled me, and I could not pray or sleep unless I had told him and been forgiven.

I could have been well content to gaze for ever upon that stranger, so he had not seen the gaze. I felt as if my eyes and heart throbbed in unison — both filled by the memory of a passing stranger! I knew this was unmaidenly; my blushes, full and warm, told me so in soft reproaches,—but could I tell my father that?

Again my father called; I went languidly between the blooming rows of flowers of which he was so proud. There were two doors to the school-room,—one opened into the street, the other into the garden; from this my father came, calling me loudly; he took me by the hand and brought me in, and there was the stranger —Sir Oswald Harvey!

I knew not at first what my father said, but every word Sir Oswald spoke was graven on my heart; yet the words were of no import; they were commonly courteous, nothing more. My father, in his pride of me, exhibited my embroidery, and found that Miss Mansfeld had never mentioned it. Sir Oswald admired the work, and said I must embroider the backs and seats of three Venetian chairs, and covers of three footstools, on white satin, for the future Lady Harvey's boudoir; the chairs he had chosen, but Miss Mansfeld would select the bouquets I was to work—her taste was perfect.

My father went into his usual raptures about the intended bride; and, while he spoke, Sir Oswald's proud face softened into warmth and tenderness. I saw how he loved her,—why should he not? Did I not wish him happy?—could he be happy with one he loved not?

"And do you not share your father's

admiration of Miss Mansfeld? What did you say your daughter's name was, my old friend? Ah, Mildred. Do you not admire the future mistress of Brecken Hall?" I answered something which must have been poor and awkward, for my father apologised for my timidity;—"I was shy," he said, "always shy."

Sir Oswald then inquired about the state of the villagers: my father must tell him who needed assistance, and who were worthy of it; he intended to become quite a country gentleman, to live in future for, and among, his tenants, to make himself acquainted with them, not through his agent, but personally; he had a dream of a superior sort of school—a model-school, in fact, of which a dear old friend of his (and he placed his hand affectionately on my father's shoulder) should be nominally the master—only nominally, as it was time—and he quoted some Latin line, at which my father rubbed his hands, and added,

"Only this, Sir Oswald, if any boy learns Latin, it must be from me. I will forthwith draw out such a code of regulations as was never yet put into practice at a country school, and submit it to you. I will begin this very evening."

"Miss Mansfeld, who has the interests of the poor deeply at heart," continued Sir Oswald, "has formed some plans for the instruction of girls; her difficulty appears to be to find a mistress" — I felt that he looked at me—"Has your daughter ever assisted in your school?"

"No, Sir Oswald; it was not needed; I have never had a greater number than I could instruct, and I doubt if my boys would submit to the teaching of a girl; neither should I like to see her gentleness tried in my rough school-room; country lads are ill to manage. But she is not badly educated — she had a very pretty knowledge of the Latin grammar, and could soon get it up again; has got

the four first rules of arithmetic as cleverly at her fingers' ends as her needle; writes a clear hand, not so free as I could wish, but readable — a petty round hand, fit for a woman's house-book; and spells and reads as well, quite as well, as I do myself. She has much facility in cutting and shaping, as they know at the Vicarage; and if you would like to hear her read the Bible, or Milton——"

"Father!"

Sir Oswald came to my relief like a guardian angel — "He had not time to enjoy the pleasure that morning;" and then, addressing himself to me, he said, "Neither Miss Mansfeld nor I would wish you to do what is distasteful, and the silent tranquil hours you have devoted to your beautiful art have, perhaps, unfitted you for the tumult of a school-room?"

"Not at all!" exclaimed my father; "it is what I had hoped she would do; it is the most honourable calling she could

have. I will begin to prepare her for examination this very evening."

"No, that will never do," exclaimed Sir Oswald; "what would then become of the chair-covers and footstools?"

He played my father to the top of his bent; it was done not heedlessly, but with the tenderness a son might show to an aged parent.

"Remember," he said while mounting, "remember the embroidery. Miss Mansfeld, I may venture to promise, will call about it, to-morrow."

When did rank ever enter a poor man's dwelling with ordinary courtesy, and not leave there a trail of light?

CHAPTER V.

He was always before me—His voice whispered to me alike in darkness and in light—I *did* try to dispel the illusion—I *did* try to shut my ears against the sound. And then came the dangerous questioning born of hesitation. Why should I not cherish every memory of that glorious reality? Was he not my father's protector—about to become the regenerator of our limited world pure as the sun that gave us warmth, as the river that fertilized our fields? What wrong could there be in contemplating such perfection? Should we not plant our standard on a hill, and watch it from the valley? Would that I could but show my gratitude for his generosity to my father! How I caught at that idea to excuse the

homage I paid the great idol! I called this all-engrossing, all-absorbing passion — GRATITUDE; and endeavoured to attune my sensations to a belief that I should be devoid of common "gratitude" unless I found some means of proving it.

How weak seemed my needle; yet I might do something worthy of *his* approval. HE had commanded those embroideries — it would be for HIM I worked. I commenced grouping flowers — that was always my first step — a design. Now I gathered them together, and then cast them from me; Nature was not as vivid as my imagination — the flowers were surely faded! Then I triumphed in a new thought! I determined that the four seats should represent the Four Seasons — I would rifle the months of their richest treasures, and transplant them to my canvas. I had heard of Tapestries achieving fame. I coveted but the one distinction — one smile from his lips, one kind look from his eyes,

would repay all my service. I thought how I might please Miss Mansfeld only once, and then cast the consideration away, with the conviction that she could not but delight in what delighted HIM. He was the sun of the universe to me — the ONE among millions of living souls. What then must he be to *her*, whom he had chosen from the world! Envy is a poor, mean, pitiful feeling; I did *not* envy Caroline Mansfeld — but — I hope God has forgiven me! — it was a far worse feeling, that with which I regarded her. My father was so certain that she would come the next morning, as *he* had promised — the old man dressed himself in his Sabbath clothes, to the astonishment of his scholars, and cut and arranged a bouquet of his most beautiful flowers as an offering; he even wrote a little speech with which to address her, and rehearsed it walking up and down his garden. The day passed, and he was disappointed. In the evening, a black-browed

fluttering lady's-maid filled my little room with perfume and impertinence. She informed me, in broken English, that Miss Mansfeld already possessed the necessary embroideries for those chairs;—had been so kindly considerate as to send her to tell me so; even if it were otherwise, "Monsieur Sir Oswald" might arrange his stables and dining-room, his library and dressing-room, but Mademoiselle was indignant at his interfering with what belonged to her salon and boudoir. She had told him so —and *she* (the insolent femme-de-chambre) told *me* I should not encourage Sir Oswald's visits—it was not prudent! And she leered at me, with long odious eyes—glances freighted with impurity. She examined my work with an air of criticism and patronage hard to endure, and lisped out "pretty," and "really wonderful for a little miss—a country girl!" She asked me how I made false hair appear so natural, for that could not be all my own. She

gabbled incessantly, never caring whether I replied or not. She said Sir Oswald had been her young lady's slave for quite two years; no wonder if a young lady should weary of a two years' lover, she, so rich and beautiful, who could choose where she pleased; but she was such an angel, she was satisfied to wed an English country gentleman. Her papa wished she would marry one of her own country, though she knew — yes, and Sir Oswald, too, he knew, that Miss Mansfeld had much too fine a spirit ever to make an *obedient* English wife; but he was so much in love he did not care! She had seen many gentlemen in love, but never, never any one love like Sir Oswald — it was so droll — her young lady was so full of *esprit*, she treated him so often as a dog. Sometimes he rose against it like a lion; but one smile, one sweet word, brought him to her feet again. She was sure, for all her tormenting, her pretty playful, teasing ways — he so grand

and in earnest — she, as if trying to drive him mad — for all that, she (the waiting-maid) was certain that, for all her teasing, her young lady really loved him — if she did not, how could she endure so much constancy! To be sure, when Mademoiselle became "My Lady," she would be sometimes abroad, and then she need not have more constancy than she liked. And again she leered and laughed.

Unable quite to comprehend the extent of this vile, low creature's meaning, I felt it was a blessing not to understand it; and, though burning for a moment with disgust and indignation, the next I was shuddering from a far deeper cause. Had she spoken truly, and was her mistress the heartless coquette she represented? Was it possible that, possessed of the rich treasure of such love, she could torture, trifle with, and insult her intended husband? Was his devotion, indeed, so great as to endure it? I should have thanked God

fervently to have heard that *she* loved him as I knew in my inmost soul he deserved to be loved. I should have rejoiced to hear that she saw with his eyes, heard with his ears, and was proud to exist but in his shadow. This, I know, the modern school of wedlock would sneer at and call servility; I chronicle my own thoughts, feelings, and opinions. No fashion can overthrow the great law of Nature; no human law supersede the law given by God the Creator, and confirmed by God the Redeemer,—no law, to my thinking, turn the ceremony of marriage in God's temple, and at God's altar, into a civil contract. If what this fluttering woman said was true, how dark was the abyss on the brink of which Sir Oswald stood! Oh! had the rich, the beautiful, the admired, idolized heiress, no friend to warn her of the peril of her frivolity? I suppose my thoughts were written on my brow. The coarse woman asked if I was ill, and without

waiting reply, inquired if I had any message to her young lady. "No!—what message could I send? Miss Mansfeld did not need the embroidery; that was enough, there was no more to say."

She fidgeted about my room; there were some small flowers worked on satin, for bags, the produce of my leisure when I had no orders. She inquired the price of one. I was so bewildered and miserable I could not tell her. Perhaps I would let her keep it as a *souvenir?* I passed it to her without a word. She looked at me, shrugged her shoulders—rolled it up—and then attempted to kiss me. I drew back and opened the door; but nothing disconcerted her; she laughed the sort of laugh that is simply frivolous or impudent, and while putting my embroidery in her pocket told me "I was certainly not a French girl." I accepted as a compliment what she intended as an affront. I believe I had never before seen a Frenchwoman, but I

was instinctively proud at not being like *her*.

I found myself tearing up, bit by bit, every atom of the designs I had made for my Four Seasons. The disappointment was cruel, but the accompanying information was overwhelming. I clung feverishly to the hope that what the woman said was either false, or distorted by her own impurity: it seemed so utterly impossible. When my father returned from his walk he saw by my aspect that Miss Mansfeld had not been; and while I was thinking what I should say to him, he shook his head, repeating twice—

"Nor will she come—nor will she come! My Mildred, I fear you have been right and I wrong! How can it be? how can it be? so like an angel—so fascinating—and he worshipping to adoration. I met some of the men whom I know, and who are employed at the Hall; they say that Miss Mansfeld's caprice and tyranny are worry-

ing Sir Oswald to death. She is not content with knowing her power, but she must exhibit her slave even to the vulgarest eyes; she absolutely renders him contemptible ——"

"She cannot do *that*," I exclaimed indignantly; "neither man nor woman is born who can render *him* contemptible."

"You know nothing about it, girl! how should you? She makes him say and unsay —do and undo; with her, the whim of to-day is the cast-away of to-morrow; yet the very workmen declare they could lay their hands under her feet and worship as she passed. Common, coarse fellows talk of her as if she were a goddess. Now listen," continued my father, "I have heard more than I have repeated; more than I can remember; and yet for all that—though I could have almost cursed her—she passed me but now, flying her ponies over the brow of the hill, though the road is hardly finished, the groom behind, on his horse,

stumbling over the fresh broken ground. I watched her, almost breathlessly. She knew me, Mildred, and half standing, while her veil streamed like a summer cloud behind her, she kissed her hand to me twice. May God forgive me, I could have sunk upon my knees. Now that I am free to think again, I can almost believe in old spells and witchcraft. I never had that feeling towards your mother, Mildred — never; and *she* was such a woman! My poor pupil! how will it terminate? Perhaps when they are married she will change. She *must* love, that is certain, for all her torturing. Such a speech as he made at the dinner they gave him at our county town on his return to the country; and there was a ball afterwards, and she refused to dance with him, or any one. I have heard there is an old curse on Brecken Hall — and I ——"

He fell into a fit of musing, striking his stick against the floor, until my dear grand-

mother (she always did the right act at the right time) reached down the family Bible (feeble as she had grown, she could still lift that), and, pushing it towards him, sat down again at her own little table.

CHAPTER VI.

I MAY as well tell you here, my dear Mary, that soon after Sir Oswald's return I was visited with my first great sorrow. I did not feel it as keenly then as I have done since. I feel it now — yes, *now*, though I am one year older than *she* was when she was removed. I feel it now — so that tears drop upon this paper while I write. It was not a stormy trial—nothing to make the blood boil, or set the brain on fire — nothing to make us forget God's mercy, and despairingly question the rightness of His judgment. No! all was still, and calm, and peaceful as an infant's sleep. I have already written that my grandmother became enfeebled in mind and body; but the wonder was this, that while her mental powers

seemed torpid in all worldly matters, her spiritual light increased. To her all things here were fading away — all things beyond becoming brighter. Her memory grew so imperfect — shattered, as it were — one bit and another only, here and there, withstanding the surges of time, all the rest gone—that we ceased to talk with her about the past; but texts of Scripture — old-world hymns — the Parables of our Lord, she would repeat with eyes kindling into the brightness of youth. She daily became weaker; yet we, my father and myself, could not whisper of her danger to each other. Her skin continued fair and unwrinkled, and her complexion delicate as a fading girl's. She would totter into my room leaning on her staff, and, when seated in her corner, look up, like a pleased child, and say, "Here am I." She would murmur out fragments of Scripture, which came to me as if inspired; they were always apt, and full of teaching or consolation, which-

ever I needed most. Oh! how often I have longed to live over again my life with her, that I might be a better comfort to her who had been such a wonderful blessing to me. Every hard word — and my temper then would rush into sudden enmity even with the loving authority that age has a right to exercise over youth — nay, every unfitting word I ever uttered to her became as a giant of sin before me; terrible to think that I *could* have angered her.

I have said she *had been* such a wonderful blessing to me — she is so still. I feel that even now she sees what I record; and yet my very soul thrills with anguish unspeakable when I think how she passed from me, when nature was at its brightest — the very sunshine on her silver hair, her well-worn, honest hand resting on her Bible. The moment before she had said, "Here am I." I looked again; her eyes met mine — stilly, and awfully. I said, "Grandmother!" She did not smile when I said

"grandmother;" then, indeed, I knew I should see that smile no more. This is enough for you to read. Hers was one of my best influences of LIFE; the best of all —next to THE BOOK—as regards ETERNITY. I could fill a volume with memories of her virtues; but you would not care to read it, my Mary! Such records are precious only to those who have lived with the departed day by day, and hour by hour; those who will take the holy memories to their graves in "God's acre."

I return to my text.

To the passionate admiration Sir Oswald excited in my young untouched heart was now added a sympathy, which my father unconsciously increased by repeating all he heard about the future bride, and then driving me half mad by palliating her cruelty and caprice. He also seemed possessed of the one idea. Sir Oswald again called. He still spoke of his purposed school; indeed, the building had commenced. He

questioned me, as if the plan of educating the village girls being confided to my care was not abandoned, at least by him; but he said that Miss Mansfeld might have other views—"she knew best." Whenever he mentioned her with reference to any movement, he always said "she knew best," as if to confirm it to himself and others.

He looked ill; his manner, I thought, had caught one hue of hers; it was uncertain—pre-occupied! How he could endure what he had endured from his affianced bride was almost impossible to conceive. The wedding-day had been twice fixed, and twice changed. I prayed fervently, and amid floods of passionate tears, for his happiness. All this was known only to my Maker and myself. I have crept for half a mile behind the roadside hedge—concealed amid the sweet revelry of nature, amid wild roses, and woodbines, and gigantic gatherings of tangled convolvulus, and even hard and bitter brambles—I have borne the summer sun and summer rain, to see him

pass. I once prevailed on my father to go to Mansfeld church; and, under cover of my thick veil, I watched how he watched her; how, sometimes, they two would from the same book read psalm or gospel; then she would turn away and read from her own little volume, as though he were not there. What light he shed upon her from his dark luminous eyes! I dared cast no stone at the sinfulness of setting up a clay idol, even in God's house, for, had I not done the same? Again Sir Oswald came to our cottage. It was in the early twilight of an autumn evening, so that, as I shrank in the heaviness of my own mourning into a corner, I knew he had not seen me. I drank in his tones and words of consolation and sympathy to my father on his loss; and when he spoke of my grandmother as one whose venerable aspect won love unconsciously, my silent tears fell like hail into my lap. He too remembered *me*. The simple observation, "How much Mildred must feel this

death," thrilled through my heart. He, then, knew and remembered my name! Do not smile, Mary; but the rapture of that sensation I can recall *now*.

The country rang with approval of his goodness, and—though his bravery and skill in combating ancient prejudices and introducing new systems somewhat displeased the old country gentlemen,—he subdued those he could not convince, by firmness and faithfulness to his object. One improvement succeeded another so rapidly, that our Vicar's wife was more than usually bewildered by her husband's frequent declarations and appeals to her for their truth that he had suggested such and such a plan months ago—that such an improvement was one of his favourite dreams—that he had intended saying every word Sir Oswald had said at the last vestry-meeting; and so forth.

Sir Oswald continued his course triumphantly; he took broad views of everything,

and never swerved from his object to the right hand nor to the left. No wonder at the marvel there arose of his "unyieldingness" to all but the one, whose miserable vanity gloried in showing how *she* could chain the despot to her footstool.

Again the marriage-day was announced, and, in the interval, the bride elect was consistently charming. Her wonderful power of pleasing and endearing, when she chose, caused all her frivolity and tyranny to be forgotten. The people began to consider Sir Oswald the most fortunate of men. The bridesmaids were enraptured with her — and her dresses: and she was liberal with both hands. My father was again led captive, and almost forgot the bridegroom in the bride; he, too, echoed all that was said of her "playfulness," and its excuses — youth, wealth, and beauty.

The principal villagers were invited by the housekeeper to Mansfeld Grange, the day before the wedding, to see the breakfast

laid out, and catch a few glimpses of the wedding finery: all were to receive white satin favours. My father went. I feigned an illness I had not, to conceal that which I had; but, when he was gone, I found it impossible to remain within the cottage; I was suffocating — I was glad to admit the village children to rifle our garden of its flowers;—there was not for miles around one left on its stem to meet the next morning's sun; and the glowing and abundant conservatories at Brecken Hall yielded their beauties, at their master's command, to strew her footway.

After the ceremony and breakfast, the bride and bridegroom were to drive to the Hall, and there, at his entreaty, remain an hour, so that before she left England she was, by her presence, to sanctify it as a Home.

I have written, that I could not remain within my little chamber; the ceiling seemed to press upon my brain; the atmosphere was suffocating. I flew from where they

were weaving garlands, and erecting arches, and tuning their musical instruments for the morrow's bridal. The whole country was a jubilee. I could not bear it; and I could, or fancied I could, hear the bells of Mansfeld church practising their joy-peal. I flew on — on — from this distraction, along the over-arched pathways that led through copse and wood towards the Hall. I would see him — for the last time — when he passed, as he did daily from his stately home to Mansfeld Grange. "I would watch and see him," I continued repeating within myself, "for the last time — for the last time." I could see him for this "LAST TIME" without sin; hereafter I must turn my heart into iron, and not look up when his horse's hoofs rang mournful music in mine ears. But why?—ay, why, indeed? I remember drawing myself up beneath a willow, whose weeping boughs closed their curtains round me, listening and looking for his approach, and repeating "Why?—why?" Was it sin to think of him now?

—was this adoration sin? Why did I wish? Why should I "turn my heart into iron," and not look at him, when he was still more sanctified by the holiness of a marriage vow? Why not reverence and honour him when he was a husband? Did I do *more* than reverence and honour him *now?* What difference could the change in his estate make to me? Had I dared to raise my eyes to the sun, as in its glory and brightness it traversed the firmament, and say, "Come thou down hither?" Had I been inviting sin into my soul, and cherishing it as righteousness? I cried, "Father! hast Thou forsaken me? Hast Thou no angel to fold me in its wings, and take me hence to be at rest? Is there no sphere where I can shelter, and look with joy upon his happiness?" I thought of HER —that dear and venerable woman—who loved to pray that I might be kept in innocence. "Oh, Father!" I cried, "can you not send her to watch and warn a nature

she knew so well!" I have often thought her near me—fancied her shadow on my work—her footstep in my ear—heard her soft sigh—her whispered prayer. Was it illusion—all! and had I been forgotten by my God, and delivered in my early youth to my passionful and wayward nature, nursed and unchecked as it had grown, to overwhelm me! I sank down beside the tree on my knees, and lifted up my hands to heaven, shedding no tears *then*, yet sobbing, and humbled in my own esteem. At last I murmured prayers—that the temptation might pass away, that the cloud might vanish, my tranquillity return—but, while striving for my own salvation from this peril, I fell insensibly into prayer for HIM, who had tempted me neither by word nor look—the idol whom uninvited I had worshipped with such blinding idolatry. Yes—shame, shame, poor maiden! I had given my love unsought; I had no wooer, and yet was won! I entreated that

this involuntary passion in which I had secretly gloried, but whose real nature was only now revealing itself to me, might be pardoned and subdued. I crushed my rebellious heart with my clenched hands, to force it into subjection. The shame, the sorrow of a life, were gathered into that hour. I had lulled myself into imaginary security, and thought I might worship without danger. One comfort I took into my heart: my secret, as regarded this world, was safe; and God is more merciful than woman is to woman. I was there alone, under the eye of my Creator, and surrounded by His spirits. I knew I should be saved from myself: that none HERE would ever know I had wrecked my happiness of my own will. What tears and prayers mingled together! Those who are hackneyed in the ways of life would wonder at my remorse, and deem it fabulous; but may you, my Mary, never know the bitter degradation of having loved un-

sought. Sanctified and purified by prayer, I was given strength to *name* and pray for his bride—might she become worthy of the great blessing of his love; might they be happy, *both*, *both* — BOTH be happy, happy together. As I repeated this, I became calmer; I pushed away the hair from my throbbing brow. I deemed it no sin then, nor do I now, to fix my mind upon the holy woman who had cradled me in purity, and ask if she might watch over and help me still. I started, for the breeze among the pendant boughs stirred and sighed, and I felt as if a holy presence compassed and strengthened me.

My father found me, on his return, busied with my embroidery.

CHAPTER VII.

I SLEPT soundly that night. My father called me in the morning with a clear, cheerful voice, chiding me that I was not up and stirring to see the wedding. He fancied I was hurt at Miss Mansfeld's neglect, and added that I must not bear malice at such a time—Would I not go? it would be such a sight—such a pretty sight, a sight that had not been seen in the county for years. He must go at once, as the Vicar wished him to take his boys —the little lads were all to have white favours, and Mrs. Gabriel said there would be a seat kept for me in her "chaise," with her and her daughter, so that I should go "like a lady" to Sir Oswald's wedding. How often the expression occurred to me

afterwards, I should go to Sir Oswald Harvey's wedding "like a lady!"

My father soon disappeared, with a bunch of white ribbons at his breast as large as a sun-flower; but before he went, he would see me dressed, and so I pleased him in that — arrayed myself in white, praying that its purity might tend still more to purify my soul. I wrote an excuse to Mrs. Gabriel, the good-natured wife of a good-natured farmer. I was, I said, too unwell to leave home. I reminded her she had twice told me during the week that I looked ill. She sent me word that I must drink some two-milk whey, with a pinch of nitre and a teaspoonful of honey in it, and that when she returned in the evening (for they would make a day of it), she would run in and see me; her little maid added, "I had a great loss not to see Miss Jane; she looked like a blazing peony."

The village was soon emptied; left to

the guardianship of the very old, and the very young, the stillness so reminded me of the calm of death, that I felt chill, and wrapped my mourning cloak over my white dress.

I went into the corner where SHE used to sit, and drew her little spider-table to me. I opened her Bible, where her spectacles remained, marking a passage she loved much to quote, —

"Keep innocency, and take heed to the thing that is right; for that shall bring a man peace at the last."

I knew it well; yet I read it over and over again; it soothed me to read the passages she loved. I wondered if my life might be so spent that my transit from this world to the next would be peaceful, like hers. It was great selfishness to desire her return, but I could not then help it. Thinking of her, feeble and old as she had been, strengthened me. Was it not marvellous! her very name — the

name of that weak and aged woman — gave me strength. I heard our garden gate open and swing back, there was a rush of rapid footsteps on our pathway, — and then Sir Oswald Harvey stood before me! I attempted to rise — he commanded me by a gesture to keep my seat; he struggled for utterance. Never had he seemed so unlike himself, so unlike any human being I had ever seen.

"Sit still," he said, at last, "sit still, and listen to me, if you can, calmly." He spoke in a suppressed voice, more terrible than the loudest tones of anger. "You must decide at once; no time to reason — only time to feel and act. What is done must be done quickly. Observe, I say QUICKLY! — within an hour!

"Last night, too late to prevent the gathering at Mansfeld Grange this morning, Miss Mansfeld and myself AGREED, that we were so perfectly unsuited to each other, that marriage between us two

would be a sin, and a mockery of grace, human and divine. I am, therefore — mark me — I am therefore, a FREE MAN. We two are freed, I repeat to you, from all contract with each other. I am FREE — that is the simple fact. No man likes to recall how he has been outraged and insulted by a woman he has loved, as I have loved her; but every man desires to prove he can free himself from thraldom. She dared *me* to this proof! She laughed and taunted me — that, contract or no contract, I should ever be her slave — that I *could* not wed another! I swore, that before the hour of noon to-day, I would lead to the altar one who loved me better than ever she loved me. One more pure — loving — ay, and as lovely too. I shall be proud of your beauty, Mildred Kennett — proud of your beauty, and proud to show the world the beauty I discovered.

"Give me your hand, Mildred," he re-

peated twice, "give me your hand!"—but I could not move it—I had lost all power. What could I think it but a dream? "Then," he added, bending over me, "I will take it, thus——and ask you within one hour to be MY WIFE!"

I could not realise his presence, much less his words. Was it, indeed, real? He shut both my hands in his, and I felt the fever that throbbed within his veins. The mist cleared from around me, and I could meet his gaze; but his presence, the presence I so loved, was like that of the destroying angel—he was *all* VENGEANCE!

"Poor child, how you shudder; but you do not fear me, Mildred? I come to you in honour and in trust. Yet, I must tell you truly, that you would be happier as a peasant's wife than you will ever be as mine. I have no love to offer you—not a hair's-breadth of love—but as the wife of Sir Oswald Harvey you will have much that women covet, and I will be

unto you a tender, faithful husband! But I am honest, I have no jot of love to offer you——you will be my wife?"

The rapidity of his utterance — his flashing eyes — but, above all, the wildness of his manner, terrified me; he pressed my hands more tightly ——

"Help to my freedom — help me at once to prove that I have cast away *her* fetters and escaped *her* thraldom — help — help ——"

At length I was able to articulate — "If I did, Sir Oswald, you would hate me in a week; you and Miss Mansfeld have parted in storm before this, and after the storm came the sunshine. Whatever you think now, yet, in far less than a week, you would scorn the schoolmaster's daughter; perhaps curse, and cast her from you ——"

"For shame, Mildred! this is but seeming. I have your secret," he whispered, — "*You love me!* — I have heard you pray

for strength to conquer it when you believed it hopeless."

"And when I did, Sir Oswald," I replied proudly, "I received that strength."

He looked steadily at me.

"Why, this is glorious!" he exclaimed; "a brave, true girl, full of the delicacy of pride — this is rare! but now withdraw the prayer; I have much need of love. It is only such pure, devoted love as yours, that can bear with me — that can save me. Think of *that*, Mildred — *you* can save ME! This is not the resolve of an hour; I have thought over it the whole night — have had quite twelve hours to deliberate. Even now, your old friend the Vicar awaits us in the church — the church of Brecken — not the church at Mansfeld. Come, fair young bride!"

He girdled me with his strong arm — it bore me to the door.

I said, "I must have my father's counsel — my father's blessing."

"You know what the old man's counsel would be — his blessing will follow. This is trifling — I will *not* be trifled with a second time. I am now as much a tyrant as I have been a slave; it is past eleven now."

He hurried me through the porch.

"Just one moment," I entreated, "to pray and think ——"

"Not an instant," was the stern reply. Without pausing in the path, he threw off the mourning cloak I had wrapped round me in the morning, cast it from him, then lifted me into the carriage.

"You see I have done nothing hastily, Mildred. I arranged with the Vicar. I even thought of what was fitting for a bride, and this is the bridal veil." It had been thrown into the carriage — the rich costly thing he had bought at Paris: and he flung it over my head. All that followed I could never — never recall distinctly, or as it must have occurred. My

impression was that Sir Oswald carried me into the vestry, that the Vicar spoke in a low entreating tone, and that Sir Oswald answered loudly and haughtily; that the Vicar addressed me, and that Sir Oswald became still more haughty.

I remember trying to shrink into a corner of the vestry, where as a child I had stood to say my catechism, and answer my Bible questions; suddenly, I found myself at the Communion Table; the words of the great solemnity—the indestructible bond between man and woman—shook my very soul; and an indescribable pride, that instinctively arose within me, answered the questions that blast or bless a woman's destiny. I remember looking at the ring glittering on the book, and a thrill of joy, amounting to agony, when he placed it on my finger. We knelt together—and I heard the words "MAN and WIFE"——the blessing was hardly given when the clock struck twelve.

"I am free—I am AVENGED!" exclaimed

Sir Oswald, loudly; "and now"—addressing the clergyman—"remember your promise, and I shall remember mine—you at once ride to Mansfeld Grange, and tell its heiress I have kept my OATH—that before the clock struck twelve I was a married man!"

He then slowly turned to enter the vestry, forgetting I was by his side, still kneeling. There was a sound of voices, and one above them all I heard distinctly —"Mildred—my child!" This recalled my husband to what he had forgotten—he raised me gently, and as gently placed my hand within his arm; but I think it was my father who carried me, perfectly insensible, into the vestry.

It matters little what passed between my father and my husband. The high-hearted, natural, poor man, felt his child had been made the instrument of the rich man's vengeance against the lady who had insulted him—he understood this, and no

more; he was ignorant of the struggle I had battled through with my own heart, and reproached me for having been won and wed within an hour. He even, in his excitement, thanked God his mother had not lived to see that day.

Oh, Mary—that was hard to bear!

Sir Oswald, since the clock struck, had grown still and calm—his eyes sunk and heavy, and his complexion faded into an unearthly paleness. I saw this, and a strange, chilling terror crept through my veins. I fancied he was dying—yet he was all gentleness—he soothed my poor father—he appreciated his feelings, and said he honoured him the more, because he had spoken as man to man—he would think differently by and by. "He was his father now," he added, with a sweet smile, "and must bless and forgive him."

My father forgive Sir Oswald Harvey for marrying his daughter——? God help me. I then thought of the old man's deso-

late home, and how I could ever be a lady, and other sad considerations crowded into my mind—poor girl that I had been just an hour before, with a bright needle and a few skeins of silk and wool, and a few shreds and patches, all my dower!

"The whole truth!" did I promise the *whole* truth, dear Mary?

I cannot detail that scene, or my feelings—all was chaos and burning fever. I remember the beating of my father's heart, and his blessing, as he strained me to his bosom, and some words of Sir Oswald's,—and then I was in the carriage, *my own carriage*, going I did not know where,—but not to Brecken Hall. *He* had arranged it all previously. *My maid* was in the rumble, he said—"my maid." I would have inquired what I should do with her, but I feared him; I who loved him so, feared to speak to him. I gathered the veil round me, and shrunk into the corner; stealing looks at him as I used to do through the

hedges when he was riding by. At last he said, "You have not asked where we are going, Mildred; should you not like to know?"

Yes, if he pleased to tell me.

It was to his shooting-lodge—I might have heard of it—some twenty miles on the London road: and in a week or so, when my wardrobe had been properly arranged, and I had seen my father again, we should go abroad. The calm, low voice in which he spoke, revived the terror that had seized me in the church, and I asked if he were well; he said, "Not well, certainly—he had suffered much lately, but he should be better soon." Stopping to change horses, he asked for a glass of water; his old courier, Grenard, said, respectfully, that Sir Oswald had better take something stronger than water—he looked faint.

"No, nothing but water. Let them put four horses to the carriage, and hurry on."

"Mildred,"—he spoke again—and the

hand that grasped mine was hard and dry, and icy—"Mildred, I have been selfish in this; but you really love me, and women, when they really love, bear all things. I know what it is; I shall have brain fever; but you will not leave me; will not let *her* hear that I am ill; *she* would triumph *then;* would hold it out to the whole world that she caused this illness. How she would exult! It would be a new excitement for her: now, *you* must prevent that. I can trust Grenard; she insulted him, and he hates her."

My poor girl, put your cold hand on my brow;"—and then he murmured, "Thank God, her hand is not red nor vulgar—a fair, delicate hand has my poor bride."

And thus, with my bridegroom in the early stage of brain fever, I entered one of the homes that was, thenceforward, to call me mistress.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ravings of a diseased mind and the foibles of our friends should be alike sacred; it is impossible for the tender and the true to reveal either the one or the other.

I could not bear even his faithful servant Grenard to enter the room when my husband's wandering words betrayed his wandering mind. I watched him day and night, night and day, for weeks; indeed, I had no power to leave him — it was almost death to me to quit his presence; it was like plunging from light into darkness to go out among the trees and flowers I used to love so well, even to breathe the air when the physician commanded me to

do so. My life hung upon his. "If," said the physician to me one chill morning after a long night vigil—"if Sir Oswald recovers, he owes his life, under God, to you —not to me;—your marvellous watching has saved him."

Oh, what a rich reward! I believe that every natural woman has a positive enjoyment in tending upon and alleviating suffering—that, and ministering to the wants and teaching of childhood, are our two highest and holiest callings. He who not only ordered, but did, all things well, healed the sick, and taught, both in and out of the temple. What a privilege, to follow His footsteps, and feel affection for our duties. I did not at that time appreciate the advantages of wealth and rank; but I could have given up light, air, and sunshine, then and for ever, to sit beside his bed; yes, even though he knew it not. Alack, after three weeks' watching, when consciousness partially returned—not in-

deed, to resume its place in its old citadel, but for a brief visit and away, leaving the sweet promise behind that it would come again—and when the noble head, shorn of its glories, turned more tranquilly on the pillow, and his eyes wandered as if seeking some well-known face—the name he murmured was not mine; and though I bent over him, praying within my soul—oh, how fervently!—for one word of recognition, the face was turned away and a heavy sigh followed.

Long hours after, when I was smoothing his pillow, his eyes opened.

"Poor child! poor Mildred!" His feeble hand sought mine, and he kissed it.

There was a landmark to look back upon! the memory of that one kiss would pour hope into my heart, where all was lone and desolate. I lived upon it for days; ay, weeks. As his illness had been violent, his recovery was protracted; but he *was* recovering. I was with him always

— always tending and soothing, watching lest there should be too much light, yet that the needed obscurity should not be darkness — studying, when he slept, a book entitled "Cookery for the Sick," in the hope to discover something to tempt his palate, and consulting the cook almost hourly, as to what was most strengthening — seeking the flowers he liked best, acclimating his room, and never neglecting to change my dress towards evening — as I knew ladies always did — ever striving to correct any movement that was not in harmony with my new estate. I consulted works on etiquette — but they did not help me; they were too artificial; and I felt that, after all, I must trust to time and associations rather than study to become a gentlewoman. Thus from day to day, from week to week, time rolled on. Gradually, Sir Oswald became able to converse with me — or rather, I should say, able to speak to me — for I know he did not at that time think I had any ideas to ex-

change with his; he could not decide as to the extent of my comprehension—and treated me as if I were a loving child, rather than an earnest, devoted woman: he evinced all the tenderness of his noble nature, by the watchful delicacy of never asking me to do anything he fancied I could not do, lest I should feel my own deficiency; and I had not courage to volunteer more than what a *nurse* could accomplish. One evening he asked me to read to him. He approved both of the selection and the reading, and told me I had a rare gift of expression. I overheard him impressing upon Grenard his commands — that Lady Harvey should be treated with the greatest respect by the servants; and well I remember that good Grenard's answer: "I am sure My Lady deserves all the duty we can show her, Sir Oswald; but for her we should not now have our dear master." And yet I had not the consolation of feeling that I contributed more to my husband's comfort

than a hired nurse would have done. I was nothing to his heart, nothing to his soul—and yet I was his wife!

Shattered as his nervous system had been by the fearful struggle, the terribly contending emotions of the last two years —for every week of his life he had been tortured by some cruel exercise of the power *she* had acquired over him — recovering only by inches from a fearful malady, he never once gave expression to a hasty word to me. To Grenard, indeed, he was not so forbearing. Alas! he felt he had no love to bestow on me, and so tendered his respect, his forbearance, his *gratitude* for my "attention;" he used to apologise, as he grew better, for giving me trouble! No man who loved a woman ever did *that*. Yet, what right had I to expect more? Such had been his bond. Then as he grew better, other considerations pressed upon me. In a sick-room I believed I had done well; but how would it

be when he would retake his place in society, and I must be called on to take mine? I had no one of whom to ask the simplest question. I dared not ask him. He seemed to anticipate this difficulty, and would speak of habits and dress; of privileges and precedence; how well so and so received her company; and how another had failed, by forgetting that Politeness was

"Benevolence in trifles."

He was too tender, too considerate, to tell me that under such and such circumstances I must do "so and so;" but he would take an opportunity of saying, that the calm manner of his friend Mrs. A. or Mrs. B., although she was not polished, nor even well educated, got her through difficulties that would have overthrown more active and energetic minds; he would talk, not only of the advantage, but the duty, of self-possession — and this to me! While his strength was returning he formed plans of

foreign travel, and managed, without seeming to do so, to discover whether I knew the difference between a continent and an island. I had, when quite a child, a strange fondness for geography, and loved a map then much as I have loved a picture since; and, taking courage where I found my footing firm, I had the blessing to see that he was astonished at my geographical information. His wife's knowing something beyond the art of embroidery and the art of nursing, gave him pleasure! Oh, how gratefully I remembered the little torn copy of "Goldsmith's Geography," and wondered if all I had learned out of "Mangnall's Questions" would ever call a happy colour to my cheek! "Well," he said, after this discovery, "we will go abroad as soon as I am permitted by the doctor to be removed — that is, if you have no objection." This politeness was no veil; if I had "objected," he would not have gone; and, without the shadow of love for me, I could see and feel

how truly he desired to give me the little pleasures that had been the joys of my past life, and increase them into greater as I grew into my sphere. One day I found in my dressing-room a richly mounted frame for my embroidery; another day, a box of the most exquisite French flowers, which he asked me to group for an epergne. When able to leave his room, he surprised me by a visit from my dear father, who was to spend three days with me before our going abroad. He looked so venerable and so handsome, that I was quite proud of him. But oh, how my cheeks burned, and what paltry shame I endured, the very first day of this visit! Sir Oswald was delicately organised, and any offence against the conventionality of his class put him on the rack. Fortunately for me, I had been often at tables where my birth gave me no place; but the talent of the schoolmaster's daughter had rendered her a favourite, and I had a natural taste for the refinements of life, so

that I could sit at table and "feed" with as much propriety as most country ladies. I saw that Sir Oswald observed this with pleasure, though, with his usual delicacy, he never alluded to it. But, with my father, matters were different. I had never before taken note of the homeliness of his manners. My husband's flushing from pale to red told me enough. I saw my father grasping the bone of a mutton *côtelette;* using his knife when the perplexing silver fork should have been on duty; standing up and bowing when he drank Sir Oswald's health; expressing astonishment at a second course, and refusing to partake of it because "he had had enough," —that I should have told him what was coming; and calling to me in a half whisper, at dessert, to know what he was to do with his glass bowl of water—and all the time he was perfectly happy and proud, and unconscious of fault or failing —prefacing his glass of wine after dinner with "Here's to you, Sir Oswald!" and

then looking at me with eyes full of tears, and murmuring, "To think of my child being My Lady!"

I left the table as soon as I could, mortified that what my husband had intended as a pleasure to me, should have made him so miserably uncomfortable, and ashamed of myself for being ashamed of my dear father. If I had possessed sufficient self-command I could have turned off with smile or jest what became a serious trial. In the evening, when we were alone, my father overwhelmed me with questions that at first I had often asked myself, but which now seemed childish to me. He hoped I said my prayers regularly—he had heard that fine ladies often forgot to pray—was the chain round my neck real gold—and were the bright rings on my fingers diamonds? To think of his child wearing diamond rings! He did not, he said, "want to seem proud," and wished to shake hands with Grenard; but Grenard would not, and with a bow reminded him

he was "My Lady's father." I told him that Grenard was right—poor father! I showed him Sir Oswald's gifts, and he was delighted; he said the Mansfelds had left the country immediately after our marriage, and there were many wild reports, but that the burning of Master Giles' mill had made the people think of something else! He led me to inquire about our former neighbours. At that moment my maid entered. My father rose, made her a bow, and offered her a chair. How cruelly angry I was at his courtesy. When she was gone he expressed his astonishment, that, brought up as I was, I should require a maid,—I used to do every thing for myself so nicely. Was she not in my way, and was I not ashamed to trouble her? How did I know what to do with a maid? and quite a young lady she looked!

I reminded him, perhaps sharply, that I was Lady Oswald *now*, and that of course

my habits were changed. My father had a way of muttering his thoughts. He whispered, "So—so—yes—it is—I only hope she will be happy—yes—she must be changed, of course—the bramble bears roses when grafted—ay, in a year; but it takes longer for the rose to go back to the bramble; I am feeling very queer, as if I had lost my child,—and *that* is a changeling." My poor father!

The next morning I took courage, and spoke to my husband. "I think, Sir Oswald, that, perhaps, I had better dine alone with my father to-day, at two o'clock; I can dine again with you at six?"

"Thank you, Mildred; I daresay that will be better,—he will be more happy."

"And so shall I,"—and then I paused. I longed to thank him for the annuity he had settled on my father, it was more in accordance with his liberality than my father's wants; but as usual, I trembled when I should have talked. He had also

given him a beautiful little cottage, close to the old Hall, not thinking of sufficient importance that which he had so long inhabited. I lingered round his library-table, waiting to be questioned; he was leaning back in his easy chair, still looking pale and worn—"Anything else, Mildred?"

I flung myself on my knees beside him. "I want to thank you, Sir Oswald, for your goodness to my father,—I wish I might tell you all that passes in my heart." I sobbed heavily.

"There Mildred, poor little heart! I know what passes in it as well as if you told me, better perhaps,—at least I might have thought so once: thought that I was a correct heart-reader. They say men are fools on many subjects, but that every woman is a fool on one. Mildred, I do not deserve *you* should be a fool for my sake on that *one*,—and yet I like it. I do not know now how I should do without my little Mildred's love: but do not thank

me, child — *you* have no cause for gratitude."

I said I had. He shook his head mournfully, and pushed back my hair, gazing in my face—"We shall do better when we go abroad. I heard you singing a Church psalm last Sunday evening, and have discovered that you have a rich, full voice: you shall have the best masters, and cultivate it." What a rush of delight *that* gave me! "You have a clear and well-toned instrument," he continued, after one of those listless pauses when he seemed forgetful of his words. "Yes, truly, and an ear as correct as a nightingale's,— it must be well cultivated."

Mary, I tell you of these gleams of sunshine. Any kind word from him was like a current of electricity, filling me with renovated life. I do believe he was proud of my singing—in after-times it was greatly admired; and when once I had acquired confidence, and threw my whole soul into my

song, then he too applauded, and, as I have said, was proud of it. But it never touched him, never warmed him towards me: my idol was still marble; of course, I never let him hear me practise; the only fine ear that can endure *that* is a mother's. But I do not desire to anticipate. I saw, despite my father's wish to enjoy every thing, that after the first day's excitement he was ill at ease; I tried to be to him exactly what I had been, but it was impossible,—no one is unchanged by circumstances. Lady Oswald was no longer Mildred Kennett, and James Kennett the schoolmaster felt he was not the fitting father of Lady Oswald. I tried to believe I was sorry when the third day came, and I should not see my father again for more than a year. I wept, but it was at the discovery that my whole mind, spirit, heart and thought, all —all that belonged to earth and heaven, was absorbed by my one idol. I knew it was idolatry, but that idolatry was my

life! I heaped kindnesses and attentions and presents on my father, and sent presents to my old neighbours,—for my husband was very generous. To atone for this torpidity of the first affection that stirs in the innocent bosom of a child, I tried to convince myself, that when he returned "home," he would be so happy in his new dwelling. About an hour before his departure, he asked me to give him some minutes quite alone. He passed into my dressing-room, and took my hand within his. "I hope," he said, "it may not seem ungrateful; but, Mildred, do you not feel how hard it will be for me, a lone old man, as I am, to leave my cottage for a house that has no memories? I have come to that time of life when the mind's food is memory. You, my child, are lifted so far above me, that, for the future, you, my own darling, can only be to me a memory. Oh, dear Mildred, ask Sir Oswald if I may not remain in my old home, where I brought

your mother a fair young bride — ay, fairer than you are now; where you were born; where she died; and where my good mother died?"

"Sad memories, dear father."

"No, child, not sad, but peace-giving; those who moulder in the churchyard have left their spirits round me; there is only one memory that comes in sable, and that too, please God, will yet come all in light. Let me remain at the old home. I will put up a new porch, and get a gardener once a-week to set the garden straight — never work in it myself, except to train a rose or so, only perhaps a little in the twilight, when no one can see me,— and I will keep a servant — but let me die where I have lived."

My heart was hard. I thought "What will my husband think?" I did not like the poor wayside cottage to be pointed at as the residence of Sir Oswald Harvey's father-in-law!

"There is not such another mulberry-

tree in the whole county," persisted the old man; "and your robins come there just as they used when you worked under its shadow, and I feed them,— what would they do if I were gone, and a stranger in the cottage who kept a cat?"

I went to Sir Oswald, and told him.

"It is so natural," he exclaimed. "I love him the more for the love he bears his cottage. He shall have both, and live where he likes." You see how superior Sir Oswald was to me,— how high above all littleness.

My father was delighted; yet I saw there was something more. "But you went away so quickly, Mildred: I have been so used to teaching!"

My pride rose, for I felt my cheek flush, and my father saw it.

"Not so, Mildred; I am, as you know, placed above all want, save a want that wealth cannot supply,— the want of employment. There are two of my little lads

so clever, and their parents—you know them—poor. I should like them to go on with their schooling, not for money of course, only just for kindness. Think of me, who, in dark hours, when my eyesight threatened to fail, used to see [in a low whisper] the *workhouse* rise before me,—what better than I have come to!—now being able to do so much for charity! It would not annoy *you*, dear, my finishing the education of the two little lads! I shall make the school-room a library, with a painted window in it, and carpet the floor, and paper the walls; and if you like it better, I shall call the boys my little friends — only two, just to keep me from fretting—yes, my two little friends who read to me to keep me from fretting!"

Why should he fret? I was irritated at his not being overjoyed with all my husband had arranged for him. My eyes were closed against the beautiful simplicity and fidelity of his nature; but he

saw no sympathy in my face that morning, though I told him he might do as he pleased about his young readers. I have always, however, been glad and thankful that when the moment of his departure came I fell upon his neck, weeping bitterly; and he called me his little Milly. Sir Oswald saw it, and as the carriage rolled away, he drew me to his heart.

"You have a right to be proud of your father, Mildred; he is a true man!"

God forgive me—I was punished for it afterwards — but when he was really gone, and my natural emotion subsided, his departure was a relief.

Beloved Mary! You see how I endeavour to keep my bond inviolate—to tell you the *whole truth*—even at the risk of losing your esteem. But, while you read have mercy! you cannot understand the feeling that led to this, simply because *you* were born in the position you occupy; you have never known the terror of climbing

with the perpetual terror of a fall; you have never known what it is to grow from one nature into another. My heroism seemed to begin and end with the one Idolatry—for him, sacrifice was triumph; and I almost think that the panting desire to become worthy of him, in every way, forced me into an abandonment of the affections that were the healthy growth of my former life.

And yet, when the day of our departure was determined on, I longed to see my father once more; I pictured him in his new estate, decked in the handsome dressing gown I had given him, and seated like an old scholarly gentleman in the little parlour, with his two boys, well-ordered, well-clad youths, imbibing wisdom.

Sir Oswald, who read hearts as rapidly as men read books, suggested I should drive over, see him, and take him by surprise. I did so.

Can I ever forget that day, when, sitting

in a hired carriage, I peeped over the well-remembered hedge, and saw the good and venerable man seated under my mulberry-tree, teaching a group of rustic boys—for the "two" had become many! He was dressed in the same old school garments—in nothing changed, dear old father! My spirit rose against him. I could not believe at the moment that the religious simplicity of his nature prompted him to labour thus without fee or reward, for those rough boys—nor did I hear the mothers who blessed him for his teachings. I only felt that he was degrading ME—the wife of Sir Oswald Harvey—by such dress, such work, such companionship. I felt a passionate desire to reprove him, to teach him—who had so lovingly taught me—what he ought to do, how he ought to maintain his dignity. I restrained my ire; but all the sweet feelings that drew me thither—even the wish to kiss my grandmother's Bible, and once more lay my hands

on her chair — shattered and crumbled before my pride.

With a palpitating heart, and a sense of having received an injury, I turned from my once cherished home without speaking to my father, and even congratulated myself on my *forbearance.*

CHAPTER IX.

We went abroad; but the change did not produce on Sir Oswald the effect I had hoped for; though he met many early acquaintances. At first he seemed anxious to avoid receiving, or being received by, them; but my timidity abated, and I believe that in all things (as servants say) "I gave satisfaction." I was hardening my heart to expect no more.

If I could have seen him happy, I believe I should have been content; I think I should: but the cloud was never removed from his brow. He was too wise, too good, too pure, to seek the excitements that men frequently imagine will dispel depression, but which in the end terminate in despair.

The rattle of the dice had no attraction for him, and he never poured out the drop that caused the wine-cup to overflow. The glory of fine pictures, the still greater glory of fine scenery, did not give him new life. He would descant on them, and point out their beauties, and even seem to enjoy my admiration, in his cold, calm way, murmuring, "Poor Mildred, I am so glad to see you like it," placing his hand on my head as if he were caressing a child, not knowing that I was a deep-hearted, passion-full woman. In society he treated me as it became his wife to be treated; when we were alone, as a parent would treat a delicate girl. He had faith in my affection; but his mind having once taken hold of my talent for embroidery, and supposing I had no other, he filled my rooms with exquisite flowers, and presented me with one embroidery frame after another. I had been most grateful for the first of these presents, but I revolted against this

needle-bondage, and affected to treat my old solace and companion with contempt, while I studied music and painting with avidity; but he would not suffer my pianoforte studies to continue. "Mildred," he said, one morning, "I wish you to cultivate your voice, and I will appoint you a pianist to play your accompaniments; but reserve your fingers for your embroidery! There is much wisdom in triumphing over *one art*, and that is quite your own. You will sing deliciously: but at your age you could not conquer the instrument even to accompany yourself. I assure you, to accompany well is a great gift, and my wife must do whatever she does perfectly."

Thus it was only by stealth that I ventured to put my fingers on the keys; I almost felt it to be a crime because he disapproved of it.

An artist at Rome, whom Sir Oswald desired to employ, painted my portrait, and by some fashionable alchemy, I was

transformed into a beauty. The schoolmaster's daughter was talked of as the type of English loveliness! I was sufficient woman to *feel* how I was admired; but oh! the anguish of seeing my husband's placid astonishment at that admiration! He might have been, perhaps, for a moment pleased at the homage; for his faith in me expelled every taint of jealousy—if, indeed, it can exist where love has never been.

Sometimes I would notice his eyes fixed upon me with a critical inquiring expression, blended with a certain look of wonder; and once he said, "Well; my little Mildred, it appears, bears out the reputation her husband gained during his residence abroad, as a man of taste. You are very much admired, little wife."

I panted to ask if this admiration gave him pleasure or pain; but I was afraid —always afraid. He did not know me. He appeared ever either in a dream, or just waking out of one: there was an

absorbing memory, an everlasting presence, between us. I was more frank and at ease; but at times, my devotion, my idolatry, rendered me constrained and awkward when by his side. It robbed me of the "grace," the "expression," the "esprit," which the world saw and acknowledged. Mistrustful of my power to please *him*, I was sure to say or do exactly what I desired to avoid. With him I was eager, or shy, or embarrassed. I caught the language rapidly; yet, whenever I spoke it before him, I saw his cheek flush with pain at my mistakes. Mine has often flushed, with a momentary triumph, when I have heard the question, "Who is she?" whispered in the French, Italian, or English tongue, and the reply, "Oh, don't you know? The new English beauty, Lady Harvey!" And then followed, "*Who was she?*" That last question turned me into marble; but it seemed, when he heard it, to irritate Sir Oswald almost to mad-

ness. If a lady made the inquiry, he withered her by a look; if a gentleman, he sought a quarrel, although his knowledge of the world pointed out that such a course would throw us much more open to observation.

Sir Oswald permitted me complete liberty; after he had guided me to the best pictures —forming my taste on the highest and purest models—he would leave me in the society of some ladies who professed admiration and friendship for me, retiring into the libraries, or wandering—always alone when I was not his companion—among the glorious ruins of that wonderful city. Once or twice my friends rallied me on the homage I rendered my handsome, melancholy husband; and dared to suppose I would tell them some history of the cause of his abstraction. You can believe, Mary, that no one attempted this a *second* time. I have no words to express the bitterness of my contempt for any woman who gives

voice to her husband's faults. It is her duty to woo him from them within the sacred sanctuary of home—to entreat, to reason with, to struggle against them heart and soul; but never to betray. Never—never put faith in woman who, having knelt at God's altar, would go free of her bond, or abate her duty to the head and heart of her existence. I tell you, Mary—Mary dearest, believe me—this new seeking of womanly independence among married women is an outrage against God and nature; it is one of the works of Antichrist; it is what no Christian woman can dare to countenance. She can never remove the seal from the bond. Let her beware of signing it. If she find she cannot bend, let her not enter into the covenant; but having entered, no human law can unbind—no word of man unloose—what God has joined. Man was created to protect and cherish—woman loving to serve; there is no reasoning, no arguing,

"If *you* cherish, *I* will serve." If the man forget his duty, let the woman be protected; but, under ALL CIRCUMSTANCES, keep the bond inviolate. The one great poet, in a world of prose, has happily expressed the nature of this holy union—

> "As unto the bow the cord is,
> So unto the man is woman.
> Though she bends him, she obeys him;
> Though she leads him, still she follows—
> Useless one without the other."
>
> LONGFELLOW.

Marriage, in my eyes, is no more a *civil* contract than Baptism, or the most holy Sacrament of Our Lord: it is in every sense of the word SACRED, only to be dissolved by death—*if by that!*

But I have wandered from my story. The remembrance of those irritating women, and how they chattered about their husbands, ruffles my temper even now. Perhaps my little Mary will say "*that* is no difficult matter to do at any time!" Small-minded men or women are always

stumbling-blocks in my way. I lack patience—perhaps, I lack charity, to my shame be it spoken—towards creatures, so insignificant that you almost wonder *where* "the Divinity dwells within them."

I was then at Rome, cultivating every little talent, every little art, by which I hoped in time to win his love. I used to repeat over and over, after long days of disappointment, "It must come *in time*—it must come IN TIME!" And yet he was so kind, so gentle, so indulgent, so patient under the infliction of that terrible disappointment, which I saw was consuming his existence, that in the very furnace of my love I pitied, and sympathized with him. I had heard that, where women had unloving husbands, the birth of children taught them to regard the mother with a tenderness so like love as to deceive both, and that in the course of all wonder-working *time* it became love.

How devoutly I prayed for this God-gift

from heaven! I asked for *one* child—only ONE! Surely that would give a fresh current to his thoughts. More than once, when our physician hinted that this was possible, I saw a light, a hope, in my husband's face that I had never seen before—but it was soon extinguished; hour after hour, day after day, week after week, month after month, he dragged heavily through life. In English society (which is more rife of scandal abroad than even at home), a report was circulated, and we both heard it at the same moment, that Miss Mansfeld, the lovely heiress of Mansfeld Grange, was about to be married—to the new Peer. My hand was on my husband's arm at the moment, and I felt him stagger as if shot. My presence of mind enabled me to direct our informant's attention to something at the other end of the room; and as Sir Oswald sank into a chair, I stood before him. Flushed and palpitating as I was, I commenced talking rapidly to some new

acquaintances, about the Corso, and a picture of the "Maid of Saragossa" (which our host had just purchased), and balls, and whatever came to my lips—it was like talking in a dream. He rallied bravely, and loitered with me round the room. When we drew near a door, I complained of heat and headache, and said I must go home; he turned down the staircase without speaking. When we got into the carriage, he pressed my hand.

"God bless you, Mildred; perhaps one day I may become worthy of you; you have more heroism in your nature than that Maid of Saragossa of whom you spoke! How you have endured! Every day you live elevates you in my esteem."

His "esteem!" Yet, it was a great tribute. I wept over it through the night, long after he slept. Esteem — but *no* love!

The English papers had some interest for him; but after that night he never

dared to look at one—he would glance at them as they lay upon the table, anxiously, feverishly, but not touch them; at last I took them, looked them carefully over, and placed them before him. He understood this perfectly, and a "God bless you, Mildred!" was my reward. He knew, if her marriage had been there I would have removed the paper. After that incident he avoided the English, and would not enter into society, although he urged me to accept the invitations which covered our table; but this, of course, I would not do. "My husband," I said, "was not well, and I could not leave him." This excited astonishment, remonstrance, and ridicule. My new friends tried in vain to change my resolution. While I watched the changes that passed over his face, I felt as if my heart must break. Though persecuted by restlessness and fever, he never complained; his hands had become perfectly transparent; and at times his eyes were so luminous,

that it seemed as though flashes of electricity were passing from his brain; in a few moments those eyes would become heavy and lustreless, and his face haggard. Could it be, oh, life of my soul! that he was dying? And yet his inner life—the Spirit life that urges on this clogging clay to true nobility and generosity of action—strengthened within him; he never wearied of doing good, not merely by gifts, but by thought; his agents were literally his almoners, and he so devised changes and improvements for the benefit of his dependants that I dwell upon them now with a pride and gratitude which I pray I may continue to feel hereafter. Every day, every hour, increased my anxiety. I felt that, if there were not some change, his life would pass away. Nothing interested or gave him pleasure. The entreaties he received from old friends, that he would throw his energies into public life, made him writhe as if in contempt of himself.

"Read this, Mildred," he said; "read this letter from Lord L——; he thinks I *am* what I *was;* he talks to this poor frame, hanging together by a miracle, as if it had the bone and muscle of former days. *My* energy? God help me! While I struggle with this mockery of life, to talk to me of energy!"

At last I became possessed of the idea that the present degradation of Rome, linked with its memories were dispiriting; that the grand Old City was a very nursery of gloom; that the atmosphere was sepulchral; how could such an organization as that of Sir Oswald live amid such elements? —he would be better if at once removed. I besought him to leave Rome. He smiled at my earnestness, but complied at once.

"Certainly, he would go wherever I pleased."

"Venice? — he had written a poem on Venice —"

"No; not Venice, where every bridge is

a bridge of sighs, and every gondola a hearse; not Venice—"

"Florence?" No, he was wearied of the eternity of marble palaces!

"Should we go home?"

"To England? No, not yet, if ever; certainly not yet."

"Naples?"

"Well, Naples was delicious, always fresh — and such sunshine! We will go to Naples at once. I daresay the atmosphere of Rome *is* depressing — clever little Mildred, to think of *that*."

He knew how I loved him; but he always treated me like a child — still like a child.

We left Rome the following day, and as we travelled as rapidly as four Italian horses could be induced to move, he seemed to enjoy the change to the open country from the rooms in which he had been self-confined. I had become so habituated to my new position, or so absorbed by the idol of my life, that luxury and wealth

became mere matters of course; I never cared for, nor even thought of, them — I only saw, I only thought of, HIM — HIM — so gentle, and kind, and generous! I often hated my own life — I often wondered if it would please God to take me soon; and yet, in some things, I was necessary, if not to his happiness, to his comfort. I could read to him, sing to him! Well, *that* was something. Then he wearied of rapid motion, and we journeyed by easy stages. Sometimes he would ask me to stay at a place, that, however inconvenient, arrested his fancy for the time; and when within about twenty English miles of Naples, his faithful valet became so suddenly ill that he could not proceed. I proposed to leave my maid to watch over him, and that we should hasten to Naples and send out a physician who had attended Sir Oswald during his former residence there, and of whom he had often spoken; but my husband loved the old servant sincerely,

sent his courier for the physician, and determined that we should remain where we were. The inn (as you would call it) was far more picturesque than comfortable; it had been a very extensive chateau, and consisted of several turrets and galleries, narrow staircases, and half-isolated rooms, some few opening into what seemed an interminable corridor, that, as it were roofed a precipitous mass of rocks forming one side of the court-yard. This corridor was of peculiar construction, not uncommon abroad — a portion of it was open, and protected only by balustrades, upon which a broad flat board had been placed, and on it a thick cushion covered by crimson cloth; in front of this opening were seats, and it was the habit of the guests to sit there, and, leaning on the cushion, either look into the inn-yard beneath, or over the wall — which was low, and formed of rough stones — to the lovely country beyond, where a river, deep, and determinedly blue, glided rapidly

through meadow and woodland — a sweeping river, dark and dangerous, yet smooth as a looking-glass. Sir Oswald was lying on a sofa in our bedroom—the door open; I could see him while I stood gazing through the arch at the river, which had almost painfully fascinated me. I could hear the ringing hoofs of the courier's horse through the clear air, as he proceeded on his way to Naples, and the cooing of some doves that were in a state of half confinement beneath. I saw lizards basking in a cleft of the rock directly under where I leaned upon the cushion. I walked almost to the end of the corridor, to our servant's room, and tapped at the door, inquiring how he was? Margaret answered, and said he was dozing. I turned into our room, and told Sir Oswald, who thanked me for the good news by one his sweet smiles. I then wandered back to the arch, and, leaning again on the cushion, enjoyed the soft delicious air that breathes only in Italy. A little beyond the opening,

in a recess of the corridor, stood a table of inlaid marble, covered, of course, with dust, and this dust coated one or two dilapidated newspapers, which must have lain upon it for some time. I suppose Sir Oswald rose to seek a book: I saw him pass to the table; I saw him take up a paper, and, after a brief glance, suddenly drop it, as if stung by a scorpion. In a moment I was by his side; and in answer to my question, Was he ill? he silently pointed to the paper lying on the ground.

Among the scanty news was a paragraph stating that Mr. and Miss Mansfeld and *suite* were at a certain hotel in Naples. I reminded my husband that the name was not uncommon; he only said, in a subdued voice—"We will not go to Naples!" I looked for the date: that portion of the paper had been torn away. He paced up and down the corridor for some time, pausing more than once at his valet's door; then resuming his walk. Oh! how terrible

was the bitterness that I—I, who would have died to make him happy—that I stood between him and happiness. It was a wild unreasoning thought, that had simply gained strength by repetition. I asked him, as he had decided against Naples, where we should go to, and he replied, "It shall be arranged after the physician's arrival." The sky became tinged with the hues of the departing sun, which was setting behind the rocks that rose perpendicularly at the back of the house; the inn was, however, isolated from them by a deep narrow gulley, across which a light bridge had been thrown; it was only the breadth of a couple of unguarded boards, and was so frail—spanning the dark abyss—as to make me nervous while I gazed upon it, which I did from a window that was opposite the corridor. At first, my husband was feverish and restless; then he became languid, but still moving about without a purpose. At last, I persuaded him to go

to bed, promising to call him when the doctor arrived. Neither of us spoke of the subject that occupied our thoughts. Daylight faded quite away; and closing his door gently, I resumed my seat, and commenced reading by moonlight—always one of my delights. But I could not chain my mind to a page, or an idea; it wandered despite myself. I could not tell what I read. When I thought of the possibility of meeting HER, who exercised such an influence over my husband, my brain reeled. I felt that I was engaged in a combat for which I lacked strength; in hopeless agony, I clasped my hands and sank upon my knees, striving to pray. I asked God of His mercy to give me—alas! not what He pleased, but what pleased myself. I could not say "Thy will be done,"—I desired mine should be accomplished. I wondered if there were truth in tales of love-philtres and charms. I would have sought out any who could have sold me such, and pur-

chased it, to the giving up of my young life, to have known that my husband loved me even for a day. I accused God of injustice, rather than man: What had I done to be so tortured?

The river rolled on, freighted with moonbeams; it seemed a road of silver glory, a true peace-giver. How beautiful it was! how deep, and calm, and holy! By day it was blue and cold, but at night it shone in the moonlight—a fitting bath for angels. My maid came as the night advanced, and folded a shawl round me, entreating me to go to bed,—the servant, she said, was much better, and the sun would rise before the physician could arrive. At least I must lie down, my hair was wet with dew—was My Lady ill? Suddenly, we heard the sound of carriages, and the loud cracking of postilions' whips, and the great gate-bell rang, and the scene was broken up by the noisy rushing forth of servants, and the entrance into the court-

yard, of one of the heavy carriages of the country. I was glad, then, to retire to my room. My husband was sleeping, as he always did, a restless, troubled sleep; my bed was in a recess at the farther end, where a great door had been built up; and an old Indian screen, covered with the usual gorgeous incongruities peculiar to the East, divided the room. My maid knelt down silently and chafed my feet and hands—they were "so cold," she said. I did not feel them so. At last, partially undressed, I lay down, and heard the new arrivals in a far-off part of the corridor, as I supposed going to their rooms. Soon after, apparently dissatisfied, they came nearer to our end, but they spoke low,—doubtless the master of the hotel had informed them that there was a sick gentleman in one of the chambers, and they had the good feeling to remember it. Soon, all was quiet, and then I must have fallen into a deep sleep.

CHAPTER X.

I AWOKE struggling, suffocating — the chamber was filled with smoke,— my husband was dragging me from my bed; and when he opened the door, there was abundant evidence that the house was on fire! The flames were bursting up through the flooring of the corridor, so as to form a wall of fire between our chamber and the opposite side, while the night breeze from the opening fanned the flames into fury. Sir Oswald exclaimed, "Thank God, you are safe, Milly! You must creep along the floor. Do not tremble, child; there is no danger to us; but if any sleep in the opposite. rooms, Heaven help them!" He guided me bravely; when, just where the smoke was thickest, shriek after shriek rang loud,

and more loud, from the other side ; and through the cloud and the flame, which for a moment the breeze carried in another direction, we saw — both saw, and heard — Caroline Mansfeld shrieking for help. In an instant I was abandoned; a strange wild, red glare arching over me, beneath which I crouched helplessly,— alone, quite alone. I made no effort for life; I saw them, Caroline Mansfeld and my husband, clasped in each other's arms, disappearing within the room. I knew they would be saved, for I had been with *him* in that chamber, and remembered that a door, probably in the night which she had not seen, led to a flight of steps. I was suffocating, almost insensible; but I was yet clear in mind — I hoped to die — that was my last perfect thought. I felt some one dragging me along, and did not recover consciousness until I found myself above the inn, on a wide ledge of rock. I looked down upon the burning; the smoke, the

flame rolling in gorgeous majesty — crimson, scarlet, orange-tinted; the hissing, as of a thousand serpents, when water was thrown on the fire — the steam; the oaths and exclamations, the shrieks, the din, were maddening. I covered my eyes and sank upon my knees. The next moment I looked into the burning depths, the caverns of molten fire, and yet I was assured of *their* safety. The flames caught the stables, and as men crept along the rafters, I could hear the strong efforts of the poor horses to escape; they were saved — and I remember a sensation of joy in my own bosom as the last bounded in his liberty over the paved court, and from that, neighing and tossing his proud head, to the open fields. A cat with her kitten in her mouth came and laid it on my dress, mewing piteously; the poor thing was scorched, but she thought only of the little blinking kitten. That atom of life had something, that loved, to save it! God help me!

There was a terrible turmoil around me, for they carried much property over the little fragile bridge I had observed and chronicled, and every nook and ledge of the rock was made available. I remember the landlady tearing her hair, and calling on the Virgin, and the landlord swearing. Amid this distraction, a thought, that had often been with me latterly, returned with tenfold strength; none of the devils who torture and tempt humanity ever give up their prey without a strife, and if any woman have been devil-tempted, I was. I have arrived at that time of life, Mary, when the mind's food is memory; to look back to the *memory* even of that night, is in itself a poison. I hope God has forgiven me all the fierce and cruel thoughts which that night goaded me to the perilling of soul and body.

It was my husband's valet (the poor old man risen from his sick bed) who had

saved me, and had then returned to seek his master.

How the flames leaped and twirled amid the mysteries of that old house,— the cavernous rooms were brighter than they had been for centuries, the fire-fiend danced and sported in them without restraint,— and all the while the moon and her attendant galaxy of stars were calm and clear in their heavenly domain — the blue, blue sky, with the deep blue river underneath.

I remember my maid bringing a shawl or blanket, something warm, to wrap me in. I would not have it; I was scorched at heart — distracted. We pray most for death when we ought most to dread the judgment. The poor girl remained weeping and trembling by my side; I envied her those refreshing tears.

"Sir Oswald is safe, my Lady!" she whispered. I could not say "Thank God," and yet I would have given my life for

his,— yes, *then*, at that time, though, in his zeal to save *her*, he had abandoned me, it might be, to a cruel death,— then, then I would have died for *him!* God pity him! He could not help it: those who have a crown must have a cross. As the flames and the smoke decreased, I caught glimpses of the shining river, still so calm and peaceful. What would I not have given to have laved myself in its cool waters! Presently some peasants came to us, offering the shelter of their roofs, with such gentle, tender words and ways. One took up the poor cat and kitten in her apron, and carried them down the precipice; another entreated me to go with her. "Two signors and a sweet signora," they said, "were already housed in the village."

No, I would not move; I became angry, and insulted her. Margaret looked terrified. At last I sprang up the rock like a hunted roe, to avoid further importunity, my poor maid following as she best could.

More than once I was tempted to spring over the rocks, and end life and strife together. I turned an angle, and sank panting to the ground. I was out of sight, and could not see the wildness of desolation by which I was surrounded. My exhaustion was something like repose; but this was not of long duration: sounds of voices came from below, and among them I recognised that of Sir Oswald. My first impulse was to send Margaret to meet him, and say she could not find me; but the same moment I arose, and prepared for what I resolved should be my *last trial.*

We stood face to face, the beams of that Italian moon shining upon us both. Margaret left us alone together. I could not speak; I tried, but the power was denied me. I remained as if transfixed against the rock. Sir Oswald did not seem to me the same; he was changed, utterly unlike himself; the terrible internal strife, and the marks of the scorching fire, were

on his brow. I heard his words indistinctly, as if they came from a far-off distance. "I know, Mildred, that you can never forgive me; but, God knows how earnestly I have struggled against this insanity. I thought I had conquered, but I am still a slave. I do not seek to make excuse, nor hope for pardon—I only desired to perish with her, that was all—to die with *her*. I had no sinful desire to live with her, but *she* desired life. Had we perished, you would have been avenged."

"I do not seek vengeance," I faltered out at last. "I have never, since I became your wife, had a desire for aught but your happiness."

"I believe you, Mildred; I forced you to the sacrifice, and have not been able to make atonement; if you do not utterly abhor me for my desertion at such a time, let me take you to the best shelter I can to-night, and we will think, and pray, and

resolve on something to-morrow." I longed to throw myself on his bosom, but, as if a spear darted through my heart, I remembered who had sheltered there within an hour, and I withdrew from the arm he had passed round me.

He fixed his eyes on me with an expression I never forgot; I believe he left me alone to call some of the people, but I cannot tell; I was unable to realise what passed, until I found myself carried over the rocks in a sort of chair, Sir Oswald walking by my side. We stopped at a house, and Margaret assisted me to enter. I only remember how helpless I felt—helpless and hopeless!

Strange as it may sound to you, I believe I was dearer to Sir Oswald during those last few hours than I had ever been before. He did not speak; but when Margaret placed me in bed, and prevailed on me to take some stimulant she had prepared, he brought wine, perfumes, fruit, and flowers,

with his own hands; and would not leave me until he believed me in the sleep I feigned. I cannot describe the depth of despair into which I sank. That I was childless had been a great sorrow; I fancied if I had given my husband a son, he might have loved me; but now I thanked God that I had no tie—nothing to hold me to the world. As to my father, I could not be more separated from him than I had been,—what could it be to him whether I lived or died? I worked myself into the belief that there was a glorious heroism in completing the sacrifice I contemplated. My husband's only chance of happiness lay in my death. Why should I live?—what was my life but a blast, a withering blast, on him for whom only I desired to live?—the burden was too heavy to bear; I must cast it off. His heart, his life, were Caroline Mansfeld's; and after what had passed, she *must* love him. I had seen how fondly she clung

to him at that fearful moment—*that* was burnt into my brain. It was not yet break of day, and the house to which I had been brought, as if to aid my purpose, was almost upon the brink of that deep, dark, rapid river.

I crept from the bed, and attempted to open the window; it was fastened outside. I cannot describe my earnest longing to give my husband liberty by my own death. I gloried in the intent—it seemed to elevate me above myself. I felt no terror—no fear of death. Alas! alas! no fear of JUDGMENT! The beautiful river—the deep, deep water—my grave! How eagerly I panted to cast myself into it, and set him free!

I could not move the window. Creepingly, carefully, I opened my bed-room door; Margaret was in the little outer room, sleeping soundly. I passed her, and softly unbolted her door, but saw a light—the light of a lamp—beyond. I paused—I

heard voices in the distance, and various kinds of noise,—they came from the smouldering fire. I opened the door, watching the light; but the slight movement attracted the attention of my poor husband —*he* was not sleeping. "Hush!" he said, in a suppressed voice; "is that you, Margaret? has your lady moved?" I shot the bolt rapidly, just in time, for he was at the door—in the same moment I was on my bed. I heard him call until Margaret answered; and then, low whisperings; they easily shot back the bolt, and entered my room. Sir Oswald, shading the lamp with his hand, bent over me, and I heard him murmur—"My poor Milly—my poor, poor wife." If he had but said "*dear*," instead of "*poor!*"——They withdrew silently.

The entireness of my love for him destroyed even my jealousy; all I desired was his happiness. I believed that I could have fallen at Caroline Mansfeld's feet and

entreated her to reward the undying love, the love which even his high, pure nature could not conquer, and when I was gone, devote herself to him, *as I had done.* I felt that I had read rightly the triumphant look of love she cast upon him as he rushed to her through the flames. She had known what it was to lose him, and now she would indeed be a faithful wife. I was so spiritually blind, that I dared to think that, as a reward for my sacrifice, I might be appointed his guardian angel, deputed to watch over his happiness. I believed there were unseen links between the mundane world and the world of spirits, and that they were drawn together by the unconscious change of most subtile sympathies. When I closed my eyes I saw innumerable forms floating around me—wingless creatures, thousand-hued, passing to and fro through the barred window, out into the thin twilight air and back again; some crowned with jewels, others with light ra-

diating from themselves; others with what I knew were flowers—but oh! how unlike even the fairest flowers of earth—gorgeous, yet harmonious; up-springing, and yet entwining; marvellous to think of—palm-leaves of silver, and pomegranates of gold; and again human forms, outlined in prismatic colours—the features such as we believe angels have in Paradise—perfected humanity——these would be my companions. I held my arms towards them imploringly. Ah, if they would but take me with them! But there was no indication of compliance,—a faint rustling—the soft perfume of roses—a haze through which a face eloquent of compassion would look down—then fade—fade—fade away! —that was all!

While I watched for its return the morning broke — the soft grey light became luminous; there were blushes on the fleecy clouds, and golden pathways in the skies. Nature's matins had commenced—the birds

were twitting and rustling amid the leaves of the vines and fig-trees. Suddenly the world woke up, in the grand blaze of sunrise,—the joy and triumph of a new-born day!

Those Angel visitors had wiled me of THE TIME, and I must live through another day. I felt this as best—lonely as I was, there still was something I should like to do. Sir Oswald came to me—his face pale, his manner tender, yet constrained. He inquired what I wished,—Should we go on to Naples, or return at once to England? I asked him to give me till to-morrow—to-morrow morning he should know. I suppose something in my manner alarmed him, for he looked at me as if perplexed. He had never till that moment found me hard to read,—heretofore I had been a well-opened, clearly-printed book in his hands. He talked of future plans, and evidently desired to atone for that involuntary desertion; but I could not bear it, and,

perhaps sternly, demanded to be left alone.

I tried to write; I sat dipping my pen in the ink—over and over again commencing—and destroying a sentence as soon as it was on the paper. My hand trembled, my nerves were thoroughly shattered. I could not think a thought; all was confused and misty before my eyes; there were moments when I could not breathe, and I fancied that my heart ceased to beat. Was I dying? Would God, in His mercy, save me from my meditated sacrifice? I opened the window for air—there was none! it was an Italian calm, with the cloudless blue sky above, dazzling and bewildering with its brightness. Oh, how I longed for clouds to temper that brightness! I actually gasped for breath, and thought of the delicious freshness of our English breeze—the breeze that came about my own tree in my father's garden. I became aware that two persons were seated on the turf, parched

up and brown as it was, nearly under my window. I remember feeling as if fearful they would read my thoughts, and wondering how I could get away; then the softness of the man's voice attracted me; the most endearing, most caressing words of the sweet Italian tongue were lavished on his companion; her replies were inarticulate, at least to me; and then the soft, low, rich sounds came again in their abundant music: they wooed me from myself, creating anew some interest in life. They moved a little away, just under the shade of a pomegranate. How tenderly he lifted her head, and placed it on his arm, as if she were a wearied child. I saw them both. A man and a woman, past the meridian of life, — she looking so ghastly and withered that it was evident her days were numbered —he having but one wish on earth—to keep her with him. That was his whole of life; I saw it in the deep expression of his eyes, in the loving grasp of his hand, in

which hers was lost—in the tender manner his arm folded round her, so that it supported her without pressure. With his other hand he withdrew a relic from his vest, and turning away his head, kissed it passionately. I knew he prayed to Heaven that she might yet be spared to him.

However we may sympathise with the birth and growth of love in the young, and expatiate on its freshness, and grace, and hope, there is ever an inner voice that inquires—Will this last? Will this be the same in twenty—even in ten—years? It may be as true, and earnest, and devoted, but its nature will inevitably be changed. Man cannot help it—nor can woman. I will not say that it must be weakened, or tainted: it may be, and often is, stronger and more faithful, with added time, but its lightness and brightness have evaporated: it is no longer the passion of youth—it is changed. Happy, happy for the woman, when the darling of the man's

youth becomes the cherished object of his age—the respected mother of his children, the *friend* of his heart and home!

But the Italians on whom I looked, whose voices fell as softly as snow upon my ear, were tender each to the other as child-lovers could have been; there was no dread of change now; even with death so near, it was the fulfilling of all life's early promises. How rich this was! At one moment the woman fainted; he thought she was dying, and sank on his knees beside her, storming Heaven with prayers and cries of distress. In another moment I was by her side, with a flask of perfume, bathing her temples and her hands until she revived; and again her dim eyes sought those of her husband. "Thirty and two years we have loved and worked together," he said to me, "and brought up children; but SHE, my beloved, is still young; she was a mother at fifteen; women live much longer than she has lived; my beloved is

still young and beautiful; see, there is no white among her hair—and her eyes, the light of love is as bright there as when I led her forth a bride! We are well-to-do now; wealth has come to us; we need not work; and I have leisure to sit beside her and sing her the songs she loves. Oh! if the saints will but grant my prayer, and restore her, our lives shall be given to acts of mercy and charity; and if, after a little longer, they will but take us together, so that the grass may sow and seed at the same time over our grave, it is all I ask of them. It is all I ask! not much, dear saints—not much! She has been devout all her life long." I can recall even now his words, and his passionate gestures, and the deep sweet voice! He looked ten years younger than the woman—she was so faded and wasted: he so strong in life and love—continuous love! I left my flask on her lap, and returned to my room.

But a fragment of such love would have

saved *my* life! Why should such a skeleton grasp a man's heart thus within her fleshless palms? and I, in my young existence, hardly in the full bloom of womanhood, be left to perish on a burning floor? Deeply as I loved, I had never sought HIS love. Why had he made me a victim—not a wife? I would have rejoiced to perish at the stake —to have been racked on the wheel—have become anything a pure woman might be, if it could have won for me one hour of his love—of such love as that Italian, after two-and-thirty years of wedded life, gave to that aged woman? Why was I, blasted and blighted, to witness love—such love as I left beneath the pomegranate tree—and live even till night wrapped me in its cold shroud?

Strange as it may seem to you — as it seems to me now — I was strengthened; and with a rigid hand, burning, yet firm, I wrote! At first, the lines were hard. When I read, I called them cruel — cruel to HIM, who could no more help his lack

of power to love than I could dissever my love from my whole being. Who could tell which of us had suffered most?

I wept bitterly. I think those tears I shed saved me from madness. Then, sinking on my knees, I wrote him my first letter.

I wrote to him a simple farewell, saying *why* I had determined to restore to him his liberty — why resolved to free him from the chain that was weighing him down into his grave. I wrote upon my knees a prayer to God for his happiness.

I wrote to HER, — I placed before her how she had lost him, and how, now that the priceless treasure she had coveted, yet well nigh destroyed, was again within her grasp; how she should cherish it, putting away for ever, as unworthy the object of *his* love, the pitiful vanities, the vague fancies, the cruel arrogance that had shipwrecked his happiness and *her own.* It was hard to tell her how I knew he loved

her, but I was proud to record how, for the sake of honour, he had combated that love. I wished to give a prayer to *her* happiness. I could not; every sentence, every word moulded itself into prayers for him. I could not write to my father, and I did not; passing away in a strange land, the old man would think I had died in the usual course of nature; no one would cruelly wring his heart, his simple, childish heart, by saying how. I added a few lines to my husband's letter about him, just to say—alas, I cannot remember what. I often ponder if after that fire I became really insane. Surely I was miserably self-deluded. I was groping in the dark where to cast off the burden of life. I had no joy in living but that of ministering to his happiness — *that* feeling at least was a reality; but I had no power to accomplish my intense desire — the sole aim and end of my existence. I was no more to him than a titled servant. I

watched over his *comforts!* I had no share in his heart, no sympathy from his spirit — by dying, I should make him happy — HAPPY! He would after all be made happy through me! Oh, joy — yes — at last, at last, I saw the way to his perfect happiness! I was in ecstasy — my life was his! it belonged to him; he should have it!

There were sundry things in my store of valuables that I could not part with — they must lie with me at the bottom of that deep river — my ring and its diamond keeper; another ring, given me on my birthday; another and another, richer in memories even, than in gems; a bracelet, in which his hair was wrought with jewels (he had been munificent in his gifts, as if to atone, as men so often think they can, by gifts, for lack of love); a white lock of my dear grandmother's hair on my heart — these must remain with me. The other things, cameos and chains, rings and brooches, I cast back into my

jewel-case, locking it, and leaving the key upon my table. What a long feverish day it was.

He wanted me to sit beneath the trees — the river breeze, he said, was so refreshing and so cool.

No hart ever panted for the water-brooks — no lover ever more fondly longed for the electric light of *the* beloved eyes — no mother ever desired more fervently to hear the voice of her first-born, than I panted for NIGHT! to give me death and my husband liberty!

CHAPTER XI.

I COULD write much from memory on the passing away of light in that lovely land, where night is even more attractive than day; but in my great desire for darkness I lost all sense of the beauty of its approach. It was nearly midnight before sleep fell upon him; but the fatigues and feelings of the past hours claimed their tribute, and he slept soundly; his face looked whiter and more deeply marked than ever I had seen it before. I felt how soon it would wear a different aspect; the next time, I thought, I shall see it, I shall be an angel — HIS guardian angel. I dared to think this — when on the very threshold of self-murder — the everlastingly destroying sin, that admits of no repen-

tance; but, Mary, my few past hours after the fire, were almost madness.

Nay, my Mary, pardon me, He who knows all things has pardoned me, for my repentance has been long and heavy!

I promised the truth — the whole truth.

As I breathed the night air, I enjoyed a sensation of freedom. I paused and panted beneath the trees that overhung the river, gazing timidly between their branches, fearing I might be seen. The water reflected every star and starry ray. I bent over the bank and cast off my shawl. I gazed into the stream with a sense of peace — nay, of happiness. I remember the bubble and rush of water, thinking the sound a requiem. I paused again to listen — yes, it was music, soothing and sweet. My foot was advanced to take the plunge — when, arrested by a power for which I could not, and cannot now account, but which compelled obedience, I remained motionless.

That the sensation came direct from HIM who so often saves us from ourselves I truly believe to this very hour. Be it what it would, I sank upon my knees — my hands folded themselves over my bosom without the aid of will; I looked upwards, and felt as if my childhood had returned when my venerable teacher placed me by her side, and I repeated after her,

"Our Father, which art in heaven."

Gradually, gradually, the same outlines that had passed through my window on the previous night developed more and more, and bent towards me — luminous eyes filled with tenderness and compassion. Veil after veil seemed withdrawn from before me, and as each fold disappeared, I saw more distinctly the wondrous hierarchy — not sporting or twining arm within arm, as those who are of the "earth, earthy," represent them — but however glorified, still occupied, passing on missions to and

fro without guide or pathway, directed by a Power I could not comprehend.

Even while I repeated the first line of that sublime petition, some unseen force urged me forward, and, withdrawing my eyes from heaven and its hosts, I looked upon the river.

Mary, it no longer reflected the lights of heaven — no stars were shining on the turbid stream; it was a dark and warring chaos; its seething waters now gathered in to tumultuous heaps; frightful forms were confusedly mingled; here and there a lurid glare sprang upwards, as if fire and water met and struggled. I shrank back in terror and dismay. There could be no rest for body or soul in that whirl of waters. I upraised my arms to heaven; I fixed my gaze upon the out-stretched firmament. I was alone — alone, beneath the clear canopy of an Italian sky! The ministering angels had disappeared; but between me and the river descended a

banner of light — a light bright and shining — a very wall of light; a new power took possession of me, and I rushed away from what I had longed for, and now loathed. I had shrouded myself in the simple dress in which I left my home, the morning of my fatal marriage — I had retained it as an antidote against pride — and there was nothing about me to bespeak my rank. I was glad when I bethought me of those lowly garments, that they would aid concealment. I fled far away from the village and the river, and at last found I was ascending high ground. The morning was at hand, and a soft hazy light was creeping over the landscape. Weary and footsore, I cast myself on the earth and endeavoured to gather home my thoughts. All resolve for self-destruction was gone; I felt that I had been saved from a crime for which there is no repentance; but my determination to free my husband remained unshaken.

The letters; the shawl; the river — the rapid, dark, dangerous river! he would believe I had perished there! I would not undeceive him; I would conceal myself — but how? I felt assured means would be given me for such concealment. How? Could I tell? Surely, surely I was cared for? Morning was lifting away the vapours from earth, carrying them as incense to the heavens — the world was awaking. I had travelled some miles from the burning inn and the dreadful river. I had achieved a great height — had climbed a mountain; no wonder I was so weary. Suddenly, I heard a clock, the dim dull sound of an aged clock — five times it struck. I eagerly turned to whence the sound proceeded. At the other side of a ravine, not deep nor dangerous, a chasm through which, in winter time, a torrent foamed, stood the grey walls of a religious house. A many-tinted window had just caught the first glow of the rising sun; and, at the instant,

strains of sacred music floated from the voices of —— yes! — there was a mingling of *female* voices only — it was a Convent! There! *that* would shelter me, at least for a time! Yes, *there!* Even if doubts should possess Sir Oswald's mind that I had not perished, he would never seek me in a convent — he knew how I dreaded the influence of that particular faith, and would not believe I could take refuge within such walls. I concealed the jewels round my waist, and by the time the sun was risen I had been admitted into the presence of the Superior. I stated simply that I had been very unhappy, and, resolving to leave my family, entreated permission to remain there for a little — Would she grant me this for the sake of Him who had directed my steps to their sanctuary? I managed to make myself understood perfectly, although my Italian was anything but pure, and answered her questions truthfully: —

"Are you married?"

"Yes, Madame."

"Is your husband alive?"

"Yes, Madame."

"He is an Englishman?"

"Yes, Madame."

"Did he beat you often?"

"No, Madame, never."

The lady, who was midway between youth and age, retained few traces of beauty — except in her eyes, which were as full of fire as if the warmth of eighteen Italian summers still revelled in her veins. She elevated her delicately-arched eyebrows, when I made my last reply, in astonishment, and dived into an enlarged watch-pocket that she held in her hand for a supply of bonbons, having first coughed a little extemporaneous cough as an excuse for the luxury. After a few moments' pause, she resumed: —

"Is he a heretic?"

"Yes, Madame."

Her eyes flashed triumphantly.

"I see; I see. You wish to be received into our Holy Church?"

"No, Madame."

She looked at me, fixedly, a cold bitter look, and made the sign of the cross on breast and brow, muttering a prayer.

"Why did you leave him?"

"Madame," I said, "I cannot tell you; the reason will rest with me in my grave."

"You do not love him?"

"I do, Madame, more than I do my own life." I burst into tears, and, falling on my knees before her, entreated sufferance if not protection. I appealed to her as a woman not to turn me from her gates. I would be her servant, if she would only shelter me — only for a few weeks."

"I had no right," she said, "to seek shelter there; I was a heretic; I could go to Naples — there were plenty of my countryfolk at Naples! Why should I come to her? their convent was too poor to give charity to strangers." Then she

repeated, "it was not built to shelter heretics." She turned away. I followed her on my knees — I could not speak; and when she withdrew, and her black robe passed from my hands, I fell on the stones. She paused, and her eyes rested on my torn shoes and bleeding feet — (I had gone to the river in my dressing-slippers, and they could not protect me in mountain climbing) — she rang a bell; the cracked metal sent out a despairing sound that I shall never forget. I arose, weeping; an old lay sister, all wrinkles and black serge, entered with a profound reverence, to whom the Lady said a few words in a low tone, and passed slowly and sternly through the door.

The expression of disgust and contempt on the old lay sister's face roused me to something like resentment. Supposing she waited to turn me out, I resolved to save her the trouble, and was more than half way down the arched grey-stone passage

by which I had entered before I was arrested by her shrill voice. She motioned me to follow — I did so; she had the fleetness of a roe, with the footfalls of a cat, though she wore the thick shoes of the mountain: the passage was very dark: long lance-shaped unglazed apertures, only permitting the light to slant in as it were edgeways: it wound so tortuously that I was quite unprepared for the sudden opening of a door, which led to the refectory. The nuns had just finished their repast, and some were passing out from the opposite side into the garden, which was also their burial-ground — others were clearing away the scanty remains of a *maigre* dinner. But the arrival of a stranger was too exciting an incident to permit anything to go on in its usual course; those who had gone into the garden returned, and all paused in their labours, collecting round me, as country children gather round a bear on a village green. But if there was

curiosity, there was also pity in their eyes; one moved a rude seat towards me, another took hold of my hands — but the lay sister drove them away, and placed before me a slice of bread and some dried fruit. I grasped a cup half full of water to save me from fainting, for when I sat down nature seemed thoroughly exhausted; the nuns congregated together, looking at me and whispering — and then I observed several novices and more than one young girl, pupils, placed there for education. I tried to swallow the bread, but could not, and again asked for water. The lay sister went grumblingly to fetch it; but before she returned, one of the nuns brought me a horn drinking-cup nearly full of wine — it was sour, but it refreshed me, and I thanked her. I could not swallow the coarse bread: one young girl brought me an apple — I thought it delicious, but I could not eat of it more than twice. I trembled all over, and heard them whisper

that I was ill — very ill; I felt so. But this only increased the bitterness of the lay sister, whose orders were that I should be fed and refreshed, and then put out of the gate; — I *had* been fed and refreshed, and now I must depart. This command caused much chattering; and I observed that the young lady who had given me the apple remonstrated vehemently, and repeated frequently that "the good *Madré* could not intend it; it was all sister Seraphina's fault" — such a *Seraphina;* "she could not endure that anything young and beautiful should enter the walls of Santa Clara." How sister Seraphina scowled at her, and "made mouths," and cruelly forced me to rise! upon which the girl rushed forward, and pressed me into a stone seat that was near the door; and perceiving my poor feet, she knelt down, taking off her own shoes and removing mine — declaring, with unmistakeable haughtiness, that if I left the convent within the next twenty-four

hours, she would leave it also. Some of the nuns patted her on the shoulders, lovingly; others looked terror and astonishment at her boldness. It was evident, that though dressed like the others, and bearing no semblance of wealth, except its wilfulness, she was the most powerful there — perhaps that marvellous convent prize, an heiress! who, in a religious house, where all are declared equal, is ever treated with distinction. Her superb face was flushed; she heeded neither caresses nor the caressors, but, in answer to the lay sister's bitter looks, declared her determination to go herself to the good *Madré.* Such a scene of excitement succeeded this bold declaration! Some approved, others disapproved; but all talked together — while she, nothing heeding, rushed impetuously out of the refectory. Then the lay sister again attempted to carry out what she said were the commands she had received. But I was no longer able to obey her; all

power of movement had forsaken my limbs; the grey cold walls kept moving round me in a circle; the roof pressed down upon my throbbing and distracted head; the fearful struggle of the past three days had reached its climax, and all my strength was overwhelmed — a poor storm-tossed creature, among strangers whose language it perplexed me to understand. I remember repeating "Lay me down anywhere — anywhere!" I was stricken at once; I thought I was dying; and Pope's hymn floated on my memory:—

> "Cease, fond nature, cease your strife,
> And let me languish into life."

Then I heard what I believed to be the church clock of my native village strike, and I started up, crying wildly on my father. I remember that, and the terror of the nuns, as they withdrew like frightened deer, gazing at me with their large dark eyes. After that my senses became

exhausted — the room whirled round, and there was singing and moaning in my ears. I had no consciousness of the return of the brave girl who had so generously thrown herself into the breach for my sake. I do not know what they did to me, or where I was taken. I had a sensation of utter misery and despair.

CHAPTER XII.

Days and weeks passed, of which I can give no account. There were no vistas—no glimpses—no partial lights—not even a single star was there to lessen the total darkness of my life.

My first consciousness was of the presence of a crucifix; it seemed in a vapour, in a cloud, suspended in the distance: while faint sounds of music—very delicious they were—fell upon my ear. Then something hovered round me—an angel, or, next best, a compassionate helpful woman; then I became aware that I was lying on a pallet, within a low arched room, the crucifix against the wall, at the foot of my bed—the walls painfully white.

I closed my eyes, and imagined I had

slept many hours. When I awoke I tried to raise myself, but found it impossible; it was long ere I realised where I was, or what had passed. Was I really alone?—unknown?

I felt my heart swell, and my closed eyes overflow with tears. I became again conscious of a presence in the room, moving about and now arranging the coverlet. A gentle voice whispered a question, How had I slept? I opened my eyes, and saw a tall *religieuse* bending over me.

I answered I had slept long—would she tell me how long? She pressed her finger on her lip, and shook her head; her smile was so beautiful, her teeth so small and bright, that I felt as if I drew large draughts of life from her presence. Having poured out something, which she mixed carefully, she put her brown arms under me, and raised me up as if I were an infant. I took the medicine in my trembling hand, and swallowed it; and she seated herself

upon the wooden *prie-dieu*, which, with the table and a long common box, constituted the furniture of the room. She resumed her embroidery. This, after a time, excited my attention, and recalled the memory of my old craft. She frequently glanced at me, put down her work, arranged the coarse sheet or moved my pillow—smiling all the time, and directing my attention to the crucifix with her finger, and eyes cast up to heaven. How was it, that at that moment—saved as I had been from destroying my own soul — saved from perishing — cared for and tended by strangers opposed to my "faith," as I called it, without any vital knowledge of what that "faith" ought to be — with those simple, earnest eyes, filled with loving-kindness—my very nature hardened? I rose against prayer, because that prayer must be made before a cross—as if the Lord, who commanded us to pray, and taught us what to say in our prayers, in His continued mercy and ma-

jesty, cares where or in what presence His command is obeyed—so it be but TRUE and faithful. My curse was that I did *not* pray. From my infancy I was a regular trained church-goer; the means of grace had been afforded me. In my room I had knelt down morning and evening, if not over-tired or over-busy, and "*said* my prayers." I always placed my Bible beneath my pillow —but it was as a *talisman* rather than a teacher; and to pray earnestly while in sorrow, or against sin—or to glorify God, in prayer, out of my own heart, I—knew it not! My only *real* prayers—out-bursting, overflowing, prostrating themselves before the Lord—had been for my husband; but, alas, they were passion-stained, passion-tainted! Yet I knew I ought to pray. It is always a blessed thing to have the mind enriched with the words, the knowledge, of praise and prayer, as holy parents teach them to their children; afterwards, they came to me, whispering in the

night time both of mind and nature, whispering scraps of old-world faith and hope, leading to the real, gushing prayer, the speechless entreaty, speechless from its intensity—that prayer of heart, of which every pulsation is heard and recorded in heaven.

I tried to picture, in the midst of all, Sir Oswald's happiness, but I could not fasten or combine my thoughts. If the past appeared more like a dream than a reality—the future—what was the future?

Again I was mercifully blessed with sleep, and when I awoke I felt it was early morning. I heard the trill and warble that precede the first song of the bird, the indescribable movements of the insect world. I heard the soft "mooing" of cattle, and the bright trumpet-crow of the cock—very cheering that was, though it startled me; and then the matins, the psalm of awakening life, that ushers in the monotonous day to the patient sisterhood.

I tried to rise, and succeeded; it seemed so wondrous a power to place my feet on the bare stones, cold though they were; and I let the coverlet fall before I attempted that movement again. I could not stand, however, and my gentle nurse, when she entered, disapproved the exertion of my new-found strength, and gently lifted me back again, smiling and uttering the words of endearment that woo a child to obedience. She brought me some chocolate and thin crisped bread, and before I tasted it she again pointed to the crucifix. I shook my head. She uttered some words of seeming reproach in a plaintive tone; adding a few others which I understood to mean that I had been saved from the jaws of death, and should be grateful to the good God!

Proud heart! I still rejected the appeal. She continued her embroidery gravely; and when I had finished she brought water, and laved my brow and face, permitting

me to steep my hands in the delicious liquid. She then brought a comb; and, as she ran it over my head, I perceived that nearly all my abundant and beautiful hair was gone. My vanity was not extinct; perhaps it is the last of our foibles that perishes. I clasped my head with my hands — and wept.

She patted me gently, repeating "Poor thing, poor thing!" and then out of the box she drew forth the tresses that had been removed, carefully combed, and braided, and tied together with her embroidery cotton; and, to comfort me, she pushed back her forehead-band and hood, to show that her head was far more bare than mine.

How could I be so foolish! What did it matter? Yet my hair was the only thing my husband ever admired; he used to remove my comb, and make me stand up to see how long it was, and call it "a golden shower." Sometimes, the girl (my inter-

cessor) came to see me, but stealthily; her visits were evidently not permitted; she would stoop down and kiss me, and produce fruit and *confitures* from different parts of her dress, and laugh triumphantly at her *ruse;* yet, with all her wildness and waywardness, she was by no means as childish as my nursing nun!

I have never since seen so perfect a specimen of a child-woman. Her faith in human goodness was so pure that she believed in everybody and in everything. If there was a quarrel between any of the sisters (and they were continually jarring and jagging about some pious toy or little fragment of scandal), she became miserable, kissing and entreating them to be friends, and bribing them to peace, as injudicious parents bribe their children into quietness and obedience, by the promise of a sugar-plum or a cake. It seemed to me they were nearly all more or less childish; those who were not were fierce bigots, making the

sign of the cross when curiosity tempted them to enter my cell, and looking at me more in bitterness than compassion. Their little quarrels were amusing; even when visiting me they would fall out about nothing—then pout, then cry, then make it up again and embrace; their anger

"——Just like the lightning, which doth cease to be
Ere one can say, it lightens!"

The lay sister never forgave my being received and sheltered; and when obliged to bring anything to my tender nurse, would only half enter the cell, and as she turned away make mouths at me. One morning, instead of her usual white work, my "guardian" brought a piece of canvas strained on a frame, and about half a dozen flowers, which her needle was to copy. She was in despair over her task, shedding child-like tears, and declaring that before she could copy them the flowers would wither. I asked her to bring me some paper, a pencil,

and a few colours or crayons, and I would copy the tints. She did so, and then hurried away to one of those perpetual calls to prayer or penance—forms they believed would smooth their path to heaven; yet, how earnest and eager was their performance of what they considered right. Their road is thorny enough, made so not by circumstances, but of their own choice. We talk about our love of heaven—but too often as if we considered it "a primrose path of dalliance;" they labour in suffering and privation to win it. The more I *know* them *wrong*, the greater is my sympathy with what I believe to be labour in vain.

I sketched, and roughly coloured in the group, before her return, propped up against that wonderful box, which contained "everything" and was my support during the brief moments I could sit up. Propped by that, I enjoyed sketching as a new-found life, and held up my drawing to Sister Maria as she entered. Her delight exceeded

all bounds. She leaped like a young roe for joy—kissed my brow and my hands, and, with the colours still wet upon the leaves, flew out of the cell, returning rapidly with two of the graver sisters, who inspected the flowers and then my copy with determinate scrutiny, and almost refused to believe it was done in less than two hours. I explained that I had only washed it in, and would finish it more highly. I had fresh proof of the power of usefulness, which is second only to the power of gold. Before the sun set numerous comforts crowded my cell; one wise-looking old sister brought a sort of bed-table, upon which I could place my drawing —another a jug (one of those beautiful Etruscan forms that is almost a poem, and certainly a history) to hold flowers—another a large pillow—a chair, so luxurious that I wondered it was permitted within the walls, and a bason of soup, made only (I was told) for the sick—some delicious

little cakes, and strips of gilt chocolate were brought by a kind, round-faced Sister, Agatha.

I could hardly believe in the realities that gathered round me. Learning that the convent realised a good deal of money by the "fancy-work" of the nuns — fancy-work extending from an *etui* of silver wire to embroidered coverlets and large pieces of tapestry — I asked for some scraps of crape and silk, and riband; and a basket was brought me of "shreds and patches," all of the rich dyes of France. I then desired a square of black satin, and Maria placed before me more than a yard, of marvellous richness. Half-a-dozen pairs of eyes watched my movements; I told Maria I must be quite alone: I could do nothing if watched. But the "sisters" would not stir. Knowing how childish they were, and how fond of sweets, I bribed them, with my cakes and chocolate, to go away; and when they were once outside

the door, I fastened myself in, drawing the bolt with a sort of rejoicing in my returning strength, and not heeding the taps and whisperings from without.

I took up the scissors and commenced my task, in the hope of being able to prove my gratitude. I had often created a parterre of flowers in a satin garden, and the art was quite my own; but my fingers trembled — the silk tangled; I cut some things too large, others too small; I wept — so weak had I become — lest my hand had lost its cunning. At last I perfected a rose in delicate shades of pink and white crape, and mossed a rosebud with untwisted chenille. The materials were admirable for my purpose. I was delighted with my work, and almost expected to see my grandmother's admiring eyes shining upon it. I do not tell you the expectation was disappointed — but you will say, "I was weak and nervous, and imaginative," — and so I was, yet a belief in her presence

gave me power, and I really performed wonders.

I sketched out my group in chalk; but not having strength to fix the satin in the frame, and fearful of doing more until it was evenly arranged for my purpose, I was obliged to withdraw my bolt, and then sank exhausted into the chair, where the tender Maria found me. If she was enchanted by the fidelity of my rapid drawing, she was much more so with my rose, which she could better understand. She lavished upon it the most endearing epithets and caresses — kissing it as if it were a thing of life, and wanted to take it to the *Madré* immediately; but I insisted that no one but herself should see the work in progress. Poor Maria! she was proud of this distinction — so anxious to do all she could to make me happy! Day by day I was becoming still more able to enjoy the art that would evidently secure me shelter as long as I desired it. Ingrate that I was! I

grew weary of her childishness, and languished for a companion — not to take into my confidence: that would have been simply impossible; but one with whom I could exchange *thoughts*. The young girl, who, with a dozen others, there for the purpose of education, and who had taken so warm an interest in me from the first, had much nobility of sentiment, and I fancied, child though she was, that I could make her my friend; but doubtless the sisterhood feared my heretical atmosphere might corrupt her, and latterly one of the most repulsive of the sisters accompanied her whenever she visited my cell. She endured the restraint badly, and even her entreaty to learn my "needle-painting" was refused. "The Signorita must devote her time to things of more importance, and less savouring of *worldly* vanity," was the reply. Nor was she backward in the tart rejoinder — that "*they* found such acquirements of greater value than their prayers!" This

speech was of course followed by a penance; but the penances given to the young were a sort of toying with punishment. Indeed, it is impossible to imagine children more lovingly or tenderly treated than they were by those women: they were literally looked upon as juvenile angels, and caressed and "*cooed*" over in a marvellous way. I have seen a nun weep bitterly because it was necessary to deprive some little rebel of her dinner, or oblige her to repeat two *aves* and a "*credo*" consecutively. How they were ever carried through their lessons was no slight miracle to me: they were fondled into learning. I used to wonder when, having taken their places in the great battle-field of life, they looked back upon the old grey convent among the hills, what their feelings would be! I should think, the greatest affection for the long-robed, forehead-bandaged friends of their earliest youth; although, as their minds must to a certain degree expand as they

grew older and mixed in the world, exchanging their prettiness and fooleries for what, if perhaps more important, would be more dangerous phases of thought and action, they might question the wisdom that placed them under a protection which, as it imparted little useful knowledge, yielded them no *strength*. And this is the great defect of ecclesiastical seclusion and observance in female education. Their parents consider them "safe," because they are within walls that shut out external dangers and temptations, but which cannot exclude the temptations arising from within, or the knowledge of the great passion of woman's life imparted by one girl to another.

My heart yearned towards those girls when I thought of their future, and how ill they were prepared for the battle of actual life!

I recalled a story I had heard chattered over in Naples by scores of fashionable men and women: it was of a young girl

who had been removed from the convent to be wedded to a man she had never seen until the day of betrothal. It was, all the world said, a most excellent marriage, giving to her a position to which she had no right to aspire. The bridegroom in early life had been enamoured of her mother, who was guilty of the deplorable mistake of refusing the noble, and wedding a poor gentleman. The noble married also, and had children — proud young leaflets; but it would seem that neither their father's nobility, nor his wealth, nor the affection he bore his children, had uprooted the love he continued to feel for her who had refused his hand and married the poor gentleman — who was simply an artist. Years passed, when, hearing that the lady was dead, and her husband ill and in debt, and being himself a widower, he visited the painter's studio, in the hope of finding a portrait of his early love. The two aged men looked at each other — and the noble could not

but feel that age had not destroyed, though it had changed, the artist's personal attraction; while, perhaps, the painter felt a thrill of pride in the consciousness that Nature had been churlish to his rival, and liberal to himself, even to the last — for men are as proud of their beauty as are women. The noble looked over the folios, but did not find what he sought; then the painter turned some canvases from the wall; and suddenly the noble recognised the features that had been stamped on his heart. He almost feared to ask if he might buy it?

"Yes," the artist had no objection; it was a portrait of his daughter. She was at school, and the nuns were fond of her. They did not like her portraits to be sold; but what could he do? Nothing he painted sold like those portraits. He looked so thin and pale, though so handsome, and his tunic was so threadbare, that in a fit of enthusiasm in which the old man became young again, he proposed to the

painter to marry his daughter, the fair Italian of sixteen summers, and settle a handsome income on the father. The painter saw nothing wrong in the barter; to the half-starved artist, whose poverty had taught him faith in riches, if in nothing else, it was "a providence"—"a mercy;" so, first of all, he vowed a silver candlestick to his daughter's patron-saint, and then rushed to withdraw her from the convent, where all had been done that could be done to unfit her for the world—now placed before her in all its gaud and glitter, but of whose laws and temptations she was entirely ignorant. Her father listened with a worldling's ears for the greeting her beauty would receive, and she vowed her vows to the *ci-devant* lover of her mother, without knowing or caring why he married her—poor child! When at length she discovered she had a heart, she also found it did not beat for her husband. The result was terrible; it made the old noble a murderer,

and returned her, sin-stained, to the convent, within whose walls, in one little week afterwards, she was buried.

When my embroidery was finished, it was borne off in triumph by Maria, and I soon felt that it created a sensation. I was still too feeble to walk unsupported; but I was led into the presence of the *Madré*, and graciously permitted to sit down—indeed I could not stand; and then I was questioned in the most primitive manner as to my acquirements. I was shown all their fancy-work, and nothing could exceed the beauty of their white embroidery, and their straw work; landscapes also they cut in cork, and formed models of their *house*, their chapel, their refectory, and the tomb of a certain "Sister Clara," who was believed to have been taken to Jerusalem by angels, and then escorted over the Red Sea by a cloud of locusts. And, to prove the truth of the story, they had several "holy locusts" enclosed in a silver box, which the

said "Sister Clara" had put into her bosom to preserve as relics, and convince sceptics of her truth. And on her *jour de fête*—for she was the foundress of this holy house—the box was kissed by thousands of devotees. It was sometimes borrowed by a neighbouring convent to go in procession, and cure diseases, and was always carried down the mountain by two "holy Fathers," under a little white silk canopy. The good sister Maria would recite for an hour together the miracles performed by the holy locusts, and how much more efficacious they were than the relics belonging to another convent; — and no wonder, for no one knew whether the tears of "Santa Justitia," upon which they prided themselves, were tears or not. I saw *this* disbelief was born of *jealousy*, not lack of faith.

Now the locusts were there; though it was so very long ago, all were nearly perfect; and to one whose head had dropped off a

pious woman had presented a silver one with diamond eyes. And another had a golden leg; but that proved their reality, —for who would give diamond eyes and a silver head, unless these "relics were real?" Such was their reasoning, or rather, such was their Faith! I would have given much to have been so easy of belief. The convent was anything but rich, and depended much upon boarders, and the sale of embroideries—which were sent to Naples, sometimes under the care of my jealous and envious foe, Seraphina—sometimes entrusted to another equally old, envious, and ugly.

The Abbess inquired if I would object to teach my art? She assured me she prayed for my conversion. I was too glad to be employed; for, with returning strength came increased interest in life, and in the ONE who made life precious. I began to question the work of my own doing with much misgiving; and though I was still

strengthened by my devoted love, in the hope that I had secured *his* happiness, yet, as my brain regained its vigour and free power of thought, which that night of fearful burning had almost destroyed, I could not but feel I had acted throughout as if under the impulse of raging and maddening fever.

I put one question, that at times would force itself upon me, as far away as I could. Had Caroline Mansfeld become fit to be trusted with Oswald's happiness? Was she so changed that returning power would not re-create her desire to celebrate her triumph by torture? I have sprung up in the night, with that question knocking at my heart, and crushed my hands upon my brain, lest its throbbings should drive me mad. I was so thankful for work; and the eagerness, and, in many instances, the perfectly child-like simplicity and affection, of those poor secluded creatures, revived and re-assured me — it gave me self-dependence. I am not certain that it was healthy or strength-

ening to my spiritual nature; but it was a fresh state of existence. Their little huffs and tiffs, and small, though bitter jealousies —their desire to know what was going on in the world they had vowed to forsake,— their interest in its fashions—their delight over a well-dressed doll that was sent to one of the pupils, kept the convent in a turmoil for two days. How they caressed and fondled it; but my gentle nurse, Maria, turned from it weeping, and wept bitterly in my cell. Doubtless the waxen image recalled some passages in the early passing away of her life!

Their general tendency to exaggeration, —the highly-wrought sensibilities of some, the occasional outbursts of passion from the crushed or cauterised hearts of others —the heroic determination of those of higher natures to BE STILL, in that fearfully torpid atmosphere—the fidelity with which they discharged their duties to the pupils, might close up the *present*—they could not

shut out the *past;* their weeping or laughing at the small nothings that once composed their all of happiness, often brought tears to my eyes—their pretty little lingering girlish vanities, which never grew into those of womanhood—their little boy and girl sweetheart stories, that, after all, under that hot sun, were very real, and so true and tender, always ending with the sign of the cross, and a prayer to be forgiven their sins!—the natural human love, cut off like an early rosebud, never suffered to expand, yet fragrant while perishing.

In one poor creature, the flame, rapidly and mysteriously kindled, had never been extinguished, but gained strength until it consumed, if not the soul, certainly the body's life. She died while I was there—fearfully, frantically, she died—cursing those who placed her within those walls—refusing all consolation from the Faith so liberal in its promises of pardon—taunting them as fools and betrayers, as blind

guides, who, not acknowledging the laws of nature, could not comprehend revelation; mingling, poor thing! passion and blasphemy together,—so that all who heard trembled. And I trembled the more when I thought of those who sought to bind the Samson with withes, and who outraged human feeling until it was lashed into disbelief in human virtue.

They would not bury the poor bones in the consecrated portion of the garden, but laid her, coffinless, under the shade of a Judas tree, close to the outer enclosure; the whole body of nuns declaring they knew she would never rest there, or within any walls. And then came tales of her being met gliding through the stony corridors, and lingering in the cell, to which the Abbess feared to appoint a successor; others had seen "her shadow" making attempts to scale the walls; and after many exorcisms from the Confessor, some very holy man, with processions and prayers

—not *for*, but *against* her, poor goaded woman!—her haunting spirit was finally dismissed, and incense, and bowings, and elevations of the cross and relics, and singing, announced the last triumph over her. Their singing always dispersed my scoffing; the music of the masses was a great snare to me; yet I hardly at times yielded them the palm I so honour, and which they, in their blindness, so truly deserve—the palm of earnestness, of sincerity. But their music bore me away to heaven—I had no further command of my reason—I wept and worshipped; then I was without, above, the world. But, alas! they could not always sing, and when their voices ceased, my dream, my homage, departed with it. I avenged myself on my own weakness, by unqualified and unchristian bitterness.

CHAPTER XIII.

Yes, I look back with shame at the bitterness with which I so frequently regarded those simple-minded women — not taking into account their eagerness to do right — their gropings after heaven — and their real earnestness of purpose. I should have reproached myself, not blamed them:—for truly, I shut out my light, while they were seeking theirs. I did not then believe, as I do now, that the Lord has indicated many paths to the glorious Mount of Salvation!

During the lingering and fearful death of the poor betrayed sister, who brought her fire with her, and tried for a little while to conceal, not extinguish, it, — during that wretched time, the whole convent seemed convulsed. Whisperings filled the corridors

with unearthly sounds—the hand-wringing and breast-beating of the elder sisters—the sighs and sobs of the younger. They wept at breakfast, they fasted from dinner—they laid by their work to make long prayers at every altar, and to every saint—they entreated that the holy Church would have mercy on the poor maniac. Every niche was illuminated by a votive candle, and the great altar was a blaze of light, from the huge wax candle down to the rushlight, or wick with its few oil-drops in the shell of a poor lay sister. Such mingling of miserable ignorance with faithful and earnest piety made me wretched, weak as I still was, and I was really relieved by the unfortunate sister's death. I do not know why I should recur to it again; but it always comes before me when I think of the time I passed on the mountain.

The wall of my cell formed the boundary of the nuns' walk, and was opposite to the burying-ground, where they interred their

dead; but it was shaded by green trees; and though the locality could not be called "cheerful," still, even graves smile under the influence of an Italian sky—and the birds sang there, more than I ever before heard them sing in Italy. The children's gardens and their playground were at the end of the walk; and the day after the sister's burial their young voices seemed altogether to dispel the gloom.

The Abbess, Maria told me, desired the pupils to avoid forming particular friendships, where *all* should love *all.* But this did not prevent the little private attachments and confidences which grow without being perceived, because they grow imperceptibly. Many were, of course, built upon sand; others perished, because there was nothing to sustain them; others died out rapidly, almost as rapidly as they sprang up, founded on a small pique or jealousy against some one, which, however bitter, was usually soon forgotten—yet the friend-

ship also died out; other young creatures, united by that mysterious sympathy which is dropped into all hearts from the same Vial, would certainly, however dissevered by time and circumstances, still walk through the world together, though separated, unforgetting—not, perhaps, to meet here, but certain to have their friendship perfected—where once it was sanctified—in heaven!

When at work my tears often fell in mournful harmony with the sweet voices of the young in their playground; while at other times I felt joyous with them, as if I could be a greater child than ever, and join in their sports. I used to watch for the rush of their footfalls on the gravel walk; and often, during a little pause, I knew that a pebble or two would dart through the open window of my cell, followed by a rose, or a few sprigs of lavender tied together, or a bouquet, sweetmeats, or a little bundle of riband-clippings, or strips

of silk, evidently intended to help my embroidery—it was all very pretty and playful; and if I opened my door, a whole phalanx of eyes would flash on me, and then the little ones would bound away like young fawns under heavy-leaved trees, and fling themselves into their playground, or disperse among their gardens—and I returned alone to my work.

Maria was commissioned to offer me a better room—one more cheerful; but no, I had grown accustomed to the rustle of the leaves, and the soft echoing music from the chapel, and the song and twittering of the birds, and the patter of the children's feet, and the measured footsteps of the sisters, and even the firm heavy tread of the Confessor, who certainly disapproved of me altogether—who, if he met me, when I began to creep into the sunshine, never failed to make the sign of the cross, not for my sake, but for his own. How strange was my existence there, and then, and how

I endeavoured to subdue my still passionfull nature, to believe that I really laboured to do so, to argue that I had made a right sacrifice, and, despite my repeating this to myself, shudder over the realisation of *my* husband becoming *her* husband. I could not dwell upon it. I had overrated my power of endurance. I found it also impossible to overcome a lassitude that increased after my illness — a perpetual lassitude — a sickness, and distaste for food, which pained Maria, and alarmed the Abbess, who certainly loved the labour of my hands far better than the hands that laboured. She even suggested that I should go to some village on a donkey, while the lay sisters walked, for change of scene; but Seraphina shook her head, and looking at me, muttered—whether a blessing or an anathema, I could but guess.

I much desired to go to Naples: but why? To inquire? About whom? and to what purpose? I dared not trust myself.

I desired to write to my father; my heart yearned towards him,—my poor father, who believed me dead; were he undeceived, what would follow? Perfect and entire ruin to my project. I worked with an invention and rapidity that astonished myself, and quite bewildered my saintly companions, and forced the Abbess, after an extra sprinkling of holy water and double crossings, to express a hope that I was not aided by an unholy familiar! and then, turning from me, sigh forth a more than usual expression of regret that I was a heretic.

The great secret of my doing so much was, that I could not sleep at night, nor could I solicit repose by remaining in bed. The stillness and darkness, the rustling of the leaves, the scream of the night-birds, worked so upon my imagination, that I entreated Maria to leave me a lamp; and when that was lit, work was my guardian against despair.

You will pity me — you, Mary, whose pure and cloudless nature has never been obscured by doubt, in whom the elements are so happily blended that the result is peace, and love, and trust, sanctified by divine faith — you will pity me, when I tell you that I was becoming like an alabaster statue in which a fierce light burns, but cannot heat the form wherein it consumes itself.

How I laboured! The flowers that blossomed beneath my needle or my brush improved in beauty; and I frequently heard the undertoned exclamation "A miracle! a miracle!"

Days passed rapidly. I was devoured by fever; but that only increased my desire for employment. More than once Maria found me fainting over my embroidery. I became possessed with gloomy forebodings — strange dreams disturbed the little repose I obtained — I felt as a malefactor oppressed by a terrible crime. I

had shut myself by my own act out and away from all I loved or cared for—I had made myself, by my own act, socially dead.

I noted that Maria often observed me with a peculiar expression in her mild, soft eyes—quite apart from that she bestowed on my work. At last, this irritated me past endurance; and one morning I asked her sharply what it was that excited her curiosity? She coloured, and turned away. Towards evening she came again; and seeing me pale and wearied, without a word removed my embroidery frame; and taking both my hands within hers, and looking straight into my eyes with her earnest look of matchless simplicity, she said suddenly—

"Have you ever been a mother?"

I replied, mournfully, that I had been a "childless wife."

"I have been a mother," she said, and drew from her bosom a little faded pink satin shoe, and held it towards me.

I felt indignant and aggrieved. Why should she insult me, after my confession, with this show of maternity? I had no sympathy with her flushed cheek or tearful eyes—I could have crushed the infant bauble beneath my foot. I pushed back her hand—roughly I did it; for I was angry.

But Maria's long suffering had taught her patience.

"I know," she persisted, "what it is to be a mother; you do not."

"And why," I demanded fiercely, "should you tell me *that?*"

"Because," she replied, "it seems to me you do not understand that in a very few months YOU WILL BECOME A MOTHER!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A SENSATION ran through my frame as if fire were in my blood. My heart beat into my throat; then I felt as if snow trickled through my veins, heat and cold succeeding each other; while my temples throbbed, and I seemed to hear a voice—terribly appalling—confirming her words.

It was true—true! The long hoped-for, long prayed-for, child would come—would rest on my bosom—smile in my face—twine its fingers in my hair—call me by the thrice blessed, thrice holy, name of MOTHER! I, who had cast away its birthright. Oh, what had I done!—what had I done! The headstrong rashness I had dignified with the name of sacrifice—to what had it led? I was entangled in my

own net. I cast myself on the floor in self-abasement, and then remembered I had no right to abase his child: his life within my life—*our* child.

During the early watches of the night the poor nun kept vigil with me; praying me to be still for the sake of the unborn—entreating me to have patience, not knowing what evil I had done. How could she comfort me, even if she had known it? What could she have said? She had no inlet to my history. Believing my husband dead, she talked in the natural fulness and affection of her gentle heart of the blessing his image would be to me—what companionship hereafter, and what melancholy bliss when it could lisp its father's name. All these natural and loving thoughts and words were as daggers in my heart.

The gaunt, rigid, truth was before me. Had I not selfishly stolen the birthright of the unborn? I asked if I could be taught to endure this, and live. Sister Maria's

compassionate sympathy bewildered me. I did not merit it,—I—I had abandoned my husband to crime, and robbed him of the joyful name of "father." I dared not cherish the consolation that I had intended to sacrifice only myself. My evil act stood before me as an actual fiend. I drove my compassionate friend from me. No eyes must see my agony—no voice attempt to soothe me. In the earnest goodness of her pitying nature, she had crouched in a corner, telling bead after bead to the Holy Mother, in prayer for her help —her help for *me*, heretic though I was! But I drove her forth, and dared to reproach the Almighty, who had saved me from a grave beneath the dark waters. As morning dawned, a better spirit ministered to me, and, falling on my knees, I thanked the Lord who had preserved me from the double crime of suicide and murder. Dear Mary, from the hour I prayed, the increasing life within was as new life from Heaven infused into my

nature. When calmed, I wondered I had not thought of this peril. But I had never been with women during their months of hope; and, occupied at home—absorbed, first by my pursuit, and afterwards by my one passion, the woman of twenty knew less of the gifts and laws of Nature than do many children of ten. I had not enjoyed the privilege of being mother-taught; my grandmother belonged to the old school, who never spoke of love and marriage but as of two ideas which it did not become young maids to entertain. I only knew that Sir Oswald wished for a son—and that so did I, because he desired it. But now —where—where was the father of my child? What perplexity—what agony—what remorse—was in that question!

I must lose no time; I must find my husband, and tell him all. Every other consideration vapoured into nothing beside the reality of my position. I did not for a moment doubt that Sir Oswald had left

Naples, if he had ever held to his intention of going there. I had been nearly four months in the convent. Where had he gone? to England?—or to Egypt?—to the Holy Land, perhaps! He would not have married so soon after my supposed death—oh, no! that would be impossible—there was time, and to spare, to prevent that. I would certainly return to England—yes, to England. I had a wild, inconceivable objection to write. I dwelt—nay I existed—in the conviction that he would love me *now*. I seized upon that blessed thought;—*now* he would love me. I should be the mother of his child—he could not but love me! I had always felt he would love *the mother*, if he could not love the wife. After his recovery, he seldom passed a child without a word or a kiss: when smiles seemed for ever vanished from his lips, the sight of a child would recall them. But, latterly, he seemed not able to endure their voices and caresses. He was one to

whom children turned instinctively for protection and companionship—the moment a child looked up into his face, it came towards him. I prayed to be directed what course to take, and it seemed that prayer strengthened my resolve—I must go forth and seek my husband.

The resolution strengthened and calmed me; and when Maria brought my breakfast she found me with my jewels in my hand, calculating their value and my probable expenses, without any practical knowledge of either.

"Surely I would not leave the convent!" she said, "they all loved me; the Superior knew my value; I was a fortune to Santa Clara; Sister Seraphina had received orders for more embroidery than I could complete in a year. She knew the convent would relax its laws, and protect me and my child. Why should I wish to leave them? They were so peaceful, and so happy—she could be happy, also, but for *her* child; the child

she should never see again! But there was no one to deprive me of mine." All this was, to me, feeble as water; I told her I must see the Abbess. At last she went to seek her, and, after a long absence, returned. "The Abbess was not well, but would see me after vespers." I entered her room with a determined air: the Madré looked me over and over, and endeavoured to discover if I had fresh secrets to reveal. She trusted I knew the value of being protected in God's house by such a sisterhood. She knew that their holy patroness enabled me to help their house, which was very poor, and which it was an unheard-of privilege for a heretic to be permitted to do—a miraculous proof of the piety of their holy protectress. I must, at all events, remain to fulfil my engagements, and no doubt my sins would be pardoned at her intercession! She altogether ignored me, and my situation: I was simply a "worker." I replied, "I had been happy to do what I had done

as a proof of my gratitude, but that having made no engagements, I had none to fulfil." She looked astonished at my frankness, and would have been angry, had she not wished to retain my services. She talked to me as if I had been a child; and when I was departing gave me a handful of the everlasting bribe, sweetmeats, with the assurance that I should be taken care of, and that I must be good and content, for I was under the especial care of the Church and the blessed Santa Clara.

I returned sadly to my cell, for I saw she had determined I should not leave the convent, and I did not know to what means she might resort to detain me. I sat to my embroidery with a real desire to finish what I had commenced; but my hand had lost its cunning — the needle passed out and in mechanically; what was traced was completed; but my invention was gone. I wept; — my tears did not restore my power.

I had a horror of writing;—it seemed impossible for me to address Sir Oswald. With that unreasoning mind which you have already seen, my Mary, had been so fatal to me, I now planned how I should cast myself at his feet, implore his pardon, and reveal to him why I had returned. I pictured his astonishment at my resurrection, changing into joy, when he knew the cause that brought me back to life and England.

I arranged my little parcel; determined to avoid Naples, but watch for some one who would guide me to the nearest seaport; and as I should not be recognised in the half-religious dress I had adopted, I could, even with my limited knowledge of Italian, make inquiries as to Sir Oswald's movements.

When a woman is suddenly thrown upon the vortex of the world, to think and act for herself, it is a question whether the Peeress, only accustomed to command, or

the Peasant, trained to unreasoning obedience, would be the most helpless; at all events, my peasant education had given me a power of self-help, and what I might call a "trade," and my lesson in rank had taught me something of the art of command that induces obedience. I could order what I required in a manner that would make my orders respected. Hope rose, with my simple preparations. When Maria came, she shook her head, and with tears entreated me to remain — to make, in fact, a virtue of necessity; for that there was a determination, of which all in the convent were aware, to prevent my departure.

This, of course, roused and strengthened my English nature. I said I would go without asking permission from the Superior; resolved to assert my right as a British subject, and leave the convent at once. I told her I knew the English Consuls at Rome and Naples, and, if detained,

I should appeal to them. Maria assured me I did not know what I said; and, clinging round me, begged me to be calm, and wait — wait for a little time. It was an unfortunate moment, she assured me, to request any favour of the Superior; she had so much sorrow just then. During the last week, one of their pupils had been given by her relatives to the convent to become the bride of Christ; but she stoutly and rebelliously refused the privilege, and had excited a spirit of opposition among the pupils, which could only be attributed to direct Satanic influence. Katerina had been to a cousin for a holiday; and her future was determined for her during her absence, but her opposition was most trying; in time she would see her wickedness, but at present it was very trying — "very trying," repeated Sister Maria. I maintained my right as a free woman to go if I pleased; but Sister Maria shook her head, and seemed quite to believe the contrary.

I became terror-stricken, and resolved to depart at once. I bound my few jewels round my waist, and declared that after all I had done — all my earnest and valuable labour — after the exertions I had made to gratify and please the Superior in return for the shelter I had received, it was impossible she would really forbid my quitting the convent when I desired. I walked firmly to the gate, and told the porteress to open it; but Seraphina made furious grimaces, and sat down, with an air of determination, on her little stone seat at the wicket. I attempted to seize the key, upon which she screamed like a maniac, and rang an alarm-bell that communicated with the interior of the convent. This brought nuns and novices in a wild troop, with flying robes and disordered looks, to the postern, imagining some assault had been made on the outer gate; last of all arrived the Abbess, somewhat flurried and out of breath, but drawing

her drapery round her with a care and skill she never omitted. We stood face to face — the Abbess, short and stout, with firm-set, well-developed features, of that soft brown hue never seen out of Italy (for, when in other climes, it becomes sallow); her features, however, were seldom called into expression, and her thin lips seemed chiselled out of pink coral; but her glorious eyes were deep, yet vivid as lightning; nothing in them, or in her, betokening a high yet chastened religious calling; nothing, save the robes, which fell in statuesque folds below her feet; — I, above the usual height of woman, fair to transparency, with large, clear, moonlight eyes, which shone upon her, and were not quenched by her lightnings — I demanded of her my liberty, in as courteous words as I could set for the occasion. It was refused. Then — poor, forlorn Englishwoman that I was — I imperiously questioned on what ground I was imprisoned?

The Abbess denied that I was imprisoned —I was "protected," and should be so, as long as that "protection" was necessary. How could I suppose they would abandon me at the time I so much needed care?

Moved by another impulse, I avowed myself the wife of Sir Oswald Harvey; but, instead of this producing the effect I anticipated, the Abbess smiled, and shook her head; while the sisters—who hung about in groups—shook theirs, murmuring "poverina," "poverina!" I saw they believed me insane! Instead of proving by dignity and firmness that I was not so, I became more and more excited, and added threats to my demands for liberty. This strengthened their impression. The poor nuns cast up their eyes and whispered together, fingering their rosaries, and ejaculating sentences of prayer. Maria, utterly astonished at my avowal that I had a living husband, crept to my side, anxious to help me, and yet unable to comprehend if I were mad or no.

The Abbess did not command silence until she saw I was conquered by my own excitement. She then made the sign of the cross on breast and brow, spoke to me a few words of commonplace kindness, such as one would address to an angry child, and recommended me to be good and quiet — adding, that I should have plenty of flowers and bonbons, while she herself would pray for me, and make an offering for me!

The sisters murmured their applause; and, as the Abbess turned away, an alley was formed for her progress between the nuns, and she proceeded slowly along, flinging blessings upon them from each hand, while several, kneeling, raised and kissed the hem of her garments.

When they had all vanished I was near the wicket, Maria by my side, and Seraphina's cold, cruel eyes bent on me with a look of malignant exultation, while she rattled the strong iron key of the entrance against the chain by which it was suspended from her girdle.

CHAPTER XV.

I COULD not sleep—I could not rest; I refused food; I heaped cruel words upon poor Maria; I walked up and down my cell more like a caged lioness than a Christian woman. What was I to do? Remain there I could not. I must by some means communicate with my husband. I appealed to Maria; but she also was closely watched. I refused to thread a needle, or draw a flower. At last I wrote to the Consul with a crayon, on a white satin riband—for ink and paper were refused me. I told him I was Lady Harvey, the wife of Sir Oswald Harvey, who was supposed to have perished in the river after the fire in the inn near Naples. I entreated him to communicate to Sir Oswald that I was alive, but detained by

force in the convent of Santa Clara; and that I required him to command my release, throwing myself entirely on his protection as an English subject. After much entreaty I obtained from Maria a promise to send this to a mysterious "*some one*," in Naples, who would certainly deliver it at the Consulate; and she assured me in the course of a week that she believed it had been received, for very close inquiries were made in the convent as to the possibility of my writing. Maria told me I was represented as a poor insane wanderer, who was protected from motives of the purest charity, and that it was quite impossible I could be the lady who had disappeared after the fire, as her body had been found and buried! At all events, I received no reply; — my hours seemed days — my days weeks. I hoped the Abbess would have permitted my departure when she no longer profited by my skill! but no; she had always been remarkable for her consistency — and those

who pride themselves upon that quality indulge it until it degenerates into the vilest and most blind obstinacy. The sombre monotony of her life did not permit the entry of a new idea, while it strengthened the old. She had said I should remain — therefore I *must* remain. She had said I was insane — therefore I must be insane. The doors of their miracle-working Church were opened, ready to receive, for Church purposes, whatever infant it pleased God to send into the world; they should be able to save the child—from its mother! I cursed them then; my womanly, motherly nature was roused—and I comforted myself with thoughts, and half-breathed words, of revenge. It did not at first occur to me that I was giving them reason for a belief in my insanity.

Maria did not look upon me as she had done—her eyes filled with admiration and sympathy. She, as well as the rest, treated me more and more as if I were an unrea-

soning child, totally unfit to become a mother. I wrote again in the same fanciful fashion—for I could accomplish my purpose in no other way—and again Maria promised the communication should be conveyed safely to its destination: though I doubted the promise, still it comforted me; my hope revived; I hoped for myself and for the little fluttering life within my own. Oh, how I pictured HIS love for our child! At other times I was certainly all but the insane thing they desired I should appear. What should I do? What could I do? The little life kindled beneath my bosom seemed to reproach me. What if Sir Oswald should marry before he knew of my existence? But I was so well aware of the delicacy of his nature, of the importance he attached to the proprieties of life, of the very wrench which my supposed death would occasion, that I believed even his passion for HER would not submerge the necessity for the prescribed year of mourn-

ing, and rejoiced in my relief from the torture which the possibility of his marriage now inflicted upon me. I could not have supported the idea, and retained my command over myself.

If I had been a prisoner of state I could not have been guarded with greater care. I was locked in my cell at night; and every step or turn I made in the garden was watched. I knew, and oh, how bitterly I felt, this! The walls were high, but I determined to scale them; I had observed where a platanus overtopped a buttress. I waited as patiently as I could for the darker nights, when the moon did not shine in the least — perfectly dark an Italian night can seldom be called. I do not know how I existed without sleep; but I am sure I never slept *consciously* for many nights. I frequently fancied I heard the soft, stealthy footfall of a cat close to the wall of my cell, and at other times imagined it was the step of some wilder animal —

larger, too, perhaps; for my quickened senses induced belief that a larger form than either fox or cat brushed against the wall. I had watched for and listened to these mysterious movements, and their return. I was, and am, a believer in supernatural visitations, and have often prayed during those long watches that I might have a palpable assurance I was under the guardianship of some glorified spirit, drawn towards me by that ever-living, ever-increasing love and piety — such as angels feel for suffering humanity. During three days, Maria had been prevented attending on me as usual, and Seraphina, my especial horror, had laid down my abundantly allotted portion of food and wine, but without the delicate fruit or fragrant flowers Maria had brought as luxuries. I had, of course, inquired for my friend; and Seraphina did not hesitate to tell me, it was not for her good or mine that we should be so intimate; that the "noble

Madré" wished me well, and so sent *her* to serve me! Thus, my one hope of communication with the outer world was withdrawn. I was as closely imprisoned as if I had been within actual prison walls. Another time she hinted, that if I became a good girl, and worked, Maria should return. It is not to be wondered at that I longed for night, and marked the approach of its mysterious footsteps. Miserable that I was, but for the now palpitating life beneath my bosom I doubt if I could have preserved my own. At last, during a moonless night, I heard the soft step, and the rustle, and, I imagined, even breathing, outside my window, and then a tapping at the shutter — which, as it was fastened outside, I could not open. I trembled so violently that I could scarcely inquire who was there. At last, even in the whisper, I recognised the voice of the young girl who on my first arrival had been so kind to me.

"Open," she said. I explained I could not; that the fastening was without. It was rapidly undone; and the sweet night air refreshed and strengthened me. With the precocity and impetuosity of the hot South, she told me she had resolved not to become a nun as her family wished, because they wanted her money. She had no parents living. The Madré was forcing her to wed the Church. She would not; she would escape; and there was one without who would help her — her adored! (the girl could not have been more than fourteen). Would I go with her? They desired to get out of Italy; — to England, perhaps, for a little while. She knew I wanted to escape; would I fly with her, and show them the way to England? She quite loved me; would I be faithful to her?

"I would."

"Would I swear?"

"I would."

"On the cross?"

"No, not on the cross — on a Bible if she liked."

"Ah, there, I was a heretic!"

"But faithful ——"

"Yes, so she believed."

"When should we go?"

"Would I really be faithful?"

I thought this so childish, when my very life depended on escape — and I told her I would swear on the cross if it assured her the more. Upon this she kissed me, and produced her rosary, over which, held by her trembling fingers, I promised to be faithful to her. Then I must swear again — not to take her lover from her! "Ah, I knew not what he was — so handsome." My spirit rose at this; but I kept it down as best I could, and thought it right to tell her I had a husband I wished to find. She sprang up like a child — an impassioned child, as she was — and kissed me through that miserable window.

"I would surely take them to England — there were no convents there — no Abbess — and no power to separate her from her lover."

"But when," I asked again, "should we go?"

"Soon — to-morrow, perhaps."

"Did Maria know?"

"No," she replied; "she had not seen Maria for days. She must be in penance — the sisters were often put away in penance."

Suddenly, she fastened the shutter and disappeared. I did not hear her footsteps departing, but I heard others approach. I heard a hand passed over my shutter, and had just time to lie down, when Seraphina, apparently without unlocking my door, stood before me with her lantern and coil of keys.

I sprang up; I demanded what she wanted. She made no reply, but opened and looked into my box; and gabbled and gesticulated — then, without another word,

withdrew — and I was alone, my mind fevered almost beyond reason. The sudden hope of liberty, ecstatic as it was, did not altogether obliterate my anxiety for the poor girl's future. Who had she made her destiny? the poor passionful child! The next night my shutter was unvisited, save by the wing of the bat, or the passing scream of the little night-hawk. But I did not sleep until morning. The day crept away in that still, frightful sameness, which is a lingering death: the Abbess sent a message by Seraphina with my noonday meal, that she wished to see me on the morrow. But for the one strong cord that now bound me to existence, how prayerfully I should have hoped that morrow I might never see.

It was a day of delicious sunshine, and I had learned to count the hours by the shadows; evening came at last, and that loathsome woman brought my evening meal. She sat on my box, where poor

Maria used to sit softening my sorrows by her sympathy; and, though I believed she had played me false as regarded my letters, yet she had been my consolation: there sat Seraphina, grasping her chin with her hard dirty palms, and telling me how grateful I ought to be; for, even if in the end I perished, my infant would be saved, because it would be taken from me — unless I entered the sisterhood. She delighted in distilling this poison; and as she talked (and I endured as best I could, clenching my nails into my own flesh to keep myself quiet by a sense of physical suffering), I perceived my midnight visitor pass and repass along the walk, humming the "Non nobis," and at last she hung about the door, as she used to do when the full tide of my popularity was flowing. I saw she was tampering with the fastening: Seraphina sharply ordered her away, upon which she playfully flung a handful of chocolate at her. This had the desired effect; she threw

herself over those which fell on the floor, in her determination that I should not partake of the luxury. My artful friend profited by the opportunity, and busied herself still more with the lock: when the porteress had found and secreted the last fragment of the delicious chocolate, the temptation was repeated with the same result, and then the laughing girl disappeared. By this time twilight had deepened into darkness — the first night-bell was ringing — "Seraphina!" was called. With an extra quantity of crossing and grumbling, Seraphina hastened away leaving my evening meal, almost untasted, behind — a very unusual thing, as certainly she generally removed more than half the food and wine. I was almost delirious with hope — and this time my hope was not disappointed: the step approached — there was a little scraping and shaking at the door, and Katerina unfastened it. My few jewels, and the food

Seraphina had left, were concealed in my dress. She took my cold, trembling hand in hers, which was warm and firm, and we glided along the wall, through the long rank grass of the cemetery, stumbling occasionally over a grave or a cross, and startling a bird from its roost, until we came to the wall. She put out her hand in the darkness, feeling along as she went, when suddenly she paused — "I have got it!" she whispered.

"Got what?"

"The rope — the ladder — feel!"

I *did* feel what seemed a fragile ladder of ropes.

"I go first," she said, with her fierce promptness; and, almost before the sentence was finished, she was hurrying on to the wall, clambering up that fearful height with the agility of a cat. As suddenly, she paused —

"When the rope is pulled three times, mount!"

My heart sank within me. I held the rope for her — how would it be when it went loose? It was so dark at that particular angle of the wall that I could hardly see beyond my own height. What, if after all *she* should desert me? The poor child might be willing to help me, might really wish me to go with her to England; but who was the man! It might not answer his purpose to give me liberty, or be encumbered by me. The ladder had ceased to vibrate; it hung in my hand. Suppose he had let it go! It seemed to me as if hours were passing. There was a pull — and then two, three — firm and strong; the first was his, the last were hers. I nerved myself. My first step was taken. How I got up or over I cannot tell; but I heard her voice — a clear acute voice striking like flint and steel upon my ears — ringing out sharply, as it always did "I move not without her!" and I was thankful to feel her arms round me, and that she kissed me on both cheeks.

CHAPTER XVI.

I REMEMBER the withdrawal of the rope, and the loving anxiety of the girl lest I was hurt; and her childish delight at the coarse peasant dress her lover had brought her, which she inspected by the light of a late moon; and her reproaches because he had not brought one for me; and his reminding her that he could not, for he had not the honour of knowing of my existence; and the chill I felt as the idea grew upon me, that the knowledge was a dreadful perplexity to him;—but after a little he assured her, courteously, that before morning he would find me a disguise as perfect as her own.

She it was, evidently, who wished to get to England. She was impressed with the

idea that they could not be safe in Italy. It seemed to me that her passion for her companion had struck sudden fire during a holiday of three days she had passed with some relative, where she had first discovered the determination they had come to as to her passing her life in the convent — poor impulsive child! Her disguise was quickly adopted; and after a rest of a few minutes we commenced descending the mountain. The man's care and attention were of course given to the girl, who little needed them. She sprang from bank to rock, over gully and stream; now swinging by a bough — then leaping a descent. Frequently she would spring back to me, extending her hands to help me, and once insisted on his carrying me over a stream, which she seemed delighted to splash through. Far up in the clouds, as it were, as the morning broke, we heard the first matin-bell of the convent. She grasped my arm, and after listening to

catch the faint sound — and crossing herself — she clapped her hands and burst into a wild laugh, so full of joy and triumph, that it turned the current of my thoughts; for every time my eyes rested upon "Carlo," (as she called him, while he called her "Bella,") I felt as if enveloped in a damp shroud. He was a well-formed, handsome man, of perhaps five-and-twenty — certainly, despite his peasant habit, with the air and manner of a gentleman — but of a gentleman in whom I could not for a moment trust — he was always peeping out of the corners of his long almond-shaped eyes; he never looked even "Bella" full in the face. His head was beautifully shaped — the brow broad, not high; but the chin and lower part of the face were full to sensuality. Add to all this, those wavering, artful eyes, lying in perpetual ambush beneath their silky lashes, and you would as soon, either upon impulse or reflection, take a rattlesnake to

your bosom as that man into your confidence. He could not smile: when he tried, his lips seemed quivering in disdain of the effort — he never bestowed one frank, free-loving smile on that trusting child, whose eyes sought his as if they had been the eyes of an angel! I was not in the mood to speculate upon who or what he was. I only questioned if his interest would lead him to be true to the impassioned fool whose heart and soul were his — a love whose triumph was its slavery, seeking no girlish concealment — an unblushing love — panting to prove its devotion for life or death — one great passion sweeping away all others. I remembered my own sense of shame when I discovered that I loved; but she longed to show it to the world. She believed in him more truly than she had ever believed in her patron saint.

Alas! for that poor heart when its shipwreck came! At length we reached a

mingling of rock and ruin — which might be a place of ambush, or a place of halt — bounded on one side by richly-wooded groves of ancient chesnuts, and on the other by rocky acclivities, that afforded sure footing only to the goat. I quickly followed Katerina's example, and threw myself on the grass. I had gone wildly onward while I had power to move, and now felt as if I should never move again; but still my heart bounded — I WAS FREE! Carlo left us to ourselves, and disappeared behind some rocks that were more than half concealed by rampant aloes and wild figs; and not long afterwards he returned, bringing a pitcher of milk, and the dress complete of a peasant or goatherd. I had no knowledge of the class to which it belonged, but he suggested that I should adopt it as my disguise. I shrank from it; but the girl sprang at it with delight. It would be the very thing for her — she would make a capital boy — she always loved to dress up

in her cousin's clothes — and I should be the *Contadina* —— and their sister — that was it! — I should be their sister. I was just a shy, modest *Contadina*. Oh, how she would ruffle and swagger as a boy! How stupid Carlo was not to think of it before! She would command him — she laughed and chatted while the sun was rising, and while we drank the milk; but at last he told us that, as we must be prepared for pursuit, the sooner we arranged our dresses the better. My look and air was so "foreign" that it would certainly betray them, unless I changed my aspect altogether. My skin could be tinted with walnut leaves; but there was my fair hair! He spoke with a contempt and bitterness I could ill endure. Katerina revelled in stratagems; she was a born *intrigante;* she could not have gone straightforward in anything. "I should be ill," she said, directly — "I should have a miserable toothache, and my face tied up — a handkerchief

all over my head like an old woman — I should be their sick sister;" and laughing as if we were free from all danger, she hurried me behind the rocks, demanding Carlo's silk handkerchief to complete the disguise. At any other time I must have been intensely amused at her genius for masquerade. She equipped herself to perfection — I should not have known her anywhere; and at every new device she ran to show herself to her lover with the most playful and simple exultation. The convent *Signorita* — the supposed-to-be devout little maiden, devoted to a heavenly bridegroom — was transformed into a perfect little "scamp." She might have passed at Naples as one of those miraculous boys who live on water melons and music — up to anything — ready for anything. Then she dressed me in her cast-off bodice and petticoat, stained my skin, and finally tied up my head and face as if I were a miserable sufferer from pain. She insisted on my

stuffing a fig into my mouth to form a palpable swelling, and exulted in her idea, because it would prevent my talking. My "bad Italian would betray me." Now, I need only shake my head — not speak. This masquerade seized upon her with such tenacity, that even Carlo was forgotten — she threw herself with as much earnestness into a phantasy as into a reality. At last, when I was transformed, she led me forth with mock solemnity, and presented me to her lover. He assured us both that our disguises were so perfect that *he* must have been deceived. "Then," she exclaimed, passionately, with one of her sudden changes of mood, "then, you cannot love me, Carlo, for love sees through all disguises." And she pouted — and then changed as rapidly again into eloquent indignation. Her eyes flashed, and it required at least two whispers and a kiss to restore her to herself. "Herself!" What was herself? At times she was like a young tiger-cat, dangerous even

in her play; at others, shivering and cooing like a frightened dove!

While I was well content with my disguise, the "lovers" walked backwards and forwards on a natural strip of terrace that overhung a rich but narrow valley. There was the mingled verdure of the ilex, the tamarisk, the palmetto, and the mastic trees. Overpowered as I was with fatigue (and, poor child, she had poured milk on my feet — for she had no water — and dried them with my cast-off dress, which she concealed in the depths of a half cell, half cavern), I lay, dozing, beneath the shade of a palmetto, yet catching, without seeking to do so, bits and scraps of their discourse. She was urging her desire to go to England, and he was combating it, in even-toned whisperings. While her young voice was modulated into every degree of impatience and tenderness, of self-will and entreaty, he was evidently waiting for some message or signal from below, and impatient at its

delay; the day waned on; my fatigue gradually lessened, and we all became restless, and anxious to proceed. Carlo procured some more milk and peasant bread, which hunger made delicious. At last, when, fairly exhausted by watching and impatience, I longed to set forward alone, Carlo questioned me, but in a gentlemanly way, as to my future plans, and particularly inquired into my resources. I showed him a ring — only one, for I had no faith in him; he examined it, and told its value to within a few scudi; but he said that, beautiful as it was, it would hardly bear my expenses to England. I told him it would not be taxed to that extent, as when once my friends received my letters I should be abundantly provided for. The girl was charmed with the ring, but chid her lover for thinking of expense. "What sufficed for two," she said, "she had always heard would suffice for three, and I should be with them. I was her friend. She loved

me from the first moment she saw me, and she hated Seraphina. She would have got me out of the convent were it only to plague Seraphina. Look! she would cut off that finger if it could torture Seraphina! — she was so cruel, and so greedy. She would steal their chocolate, their grapes, even their little trinkets, and sell them when she went to sell the work. She was a wretch, that Seraphina! — and she liked best to tyrannise over me — she would burn me, if she could — which she, Katerina, had resolved she should not do. She could imagine her wrath when she found I was gone, and had to endure the rage of the Abbess, who valued my skill. The Abbess would punish her as porteress, and she would have no food but bread and water for a week, and then she would pinch her cat for vengeance, and then he would scratch and bite her. Oh! it would be such sport — such rare sport — and all her plotting, all her own doing!" Although

Carlo questioned me closely as to England, and the expense of getting there, he gave me no idea of what his plans were; and it was only from the girl's frankness I gathered that she would be entitled to large wealth "when she was old enough." I reminded him that he should at once find a priest to unite them, and he replied, "Certainly; it should be done that evening. Only," he added, sneeringly, "he did not think that heretics attached any importance to the marriage ceremony."

I did not feel inclined to converse with him; and though the young girl, by virtue of her dress and what she had done for me, constituted herself my protectress, I was glad to continue the character she had assigned me of "her sick sister." When the hour at last arrived for the renewal of our journey, I followed them into the depths of the valley; and during this part of the journey, until nearly midnight, we were accompanied by another man, who

had been looked for anxiously—a friend of Carlo's, and who addressed Carlo as "Count." We halted at last at a dwelling, and entered a long and rather narrow room, broken into alcoves and deep bay windows, with a small quantity of rich furniture, quaint and carved, and tapestried draperies; there was a table at one end with refreshment, and lights in a massive candelabrum; but the events of the last twenty-four hours had been more than I could bear, and I was so completely exhausted that I sank into a chair, faint and trembling. The girl poured me out some wine—which I had hardly sufficient life to swallow—and then sat with the two men, and ate and drank what had been evidently prepared for them. Poor child; she did not forget me, but brought fruit and wine, and desired a woman, who seemed of some authority, to prepare me a bed. After a little, the stranger disappeared, and Katerina came, and, half sitting on the floor,

laid her head in my lap. She said she was very, very tired—and yet she was to be married that night! Carlo was cross. She wanted to have been married in her proper dress—in the robe of a lady, as she was; but Carlo would not hear of it. He said it was not safe—the disguise must be retained; he did not wish to go to England; but she would go—she would have her own way. Her lover did not like her talking to me. He advanced with exceeding courtesy of manner—regretted the haste to which they had been compelled—hoped I should not suffer from it—that the priest would arrive in a few minutes, and I should see the ceremony performed—that, from information he had received, he feared we could not start early in the morning, but writing materials should be in my room, and I could address whom I pleased—he had no doubt that all arrangements would be completed by to-morrow evening, and that then we should proceed in safety.

"To England?" added the girl—who was more than half asleep, her bright looks changed by fatigue into an expression of intense weariness.

"Whither you please," he replied, kissing her hand; "you know I am your slave."

"And I won't be married to-night," she continued pettishly. "I will be married like a lady—I will be properly dressed! Who ever heard of an Ortolani being married in the masquerade of a peasant-boy? I won't be married, if I don't like; and I don't like to be married to-night."

He passed his arm round her waist, drew her from me, and walked her up and down the room, wooing her with kind words and caresses, which truly I had never seen him do before. He showed her the ring, and tried it on her little fat finger, after much playful pouting. She evidently did not admire its plainness; and to compensate for that, he produced one of bright glittering stones, that looked brave on her brown

hand. And she was charmed. He then took a case from his bosom, and showed her a pair of ear-rings, that made her scream and jump with delight; but he positively refused to let her have them until after the ceremony. When *that* was concluded, he said, he would clasp them in her ears himself. Immediately her humour changed. Why had not the priest come? What delayed him? Was he sure he would come? Oh, she did so long to be married, to have those beautiful ear-rings! How she should like Seraphina to see them! That was it; if Seraphina could only see them, it would kill her; it would certainly kill her on the spot!

There was a time when I might have laughed at this childishness; now it struck me as positively horrible—a creature on the threshold of life's boon or blast to give a thought to such baubles! I held him in fear if not in hatred—and her in bitter contempt. Yet, why? And did not I

owe to her my liberty? How much better, even, was her earnest passion for the man than her passion for the trinkets; yet there seemed as much of love in the one as in the other. Poor child! At last, when the lights were burning low in that grand old candelabrum, and the shadows melting into darkness, a Priest or Friar—for he might have been either, or neither, if such had been the man's pleasure—entered with the stranger who had accompanied us during the latter part of our journey. He made some sharp observations on the unseemliness of the wedding-dress of my young friend; and there was much whispering and soothing, both of the girl and the priest—for she fell in with the priest's idea, and cried and sobbed as if her heart would break, while she described the beautiful dress in which she wished to have been married. At last, however, the difficulty was overcome, and the ceremony gone through. Then when it was over, she

threw herself in my arms, and asked me to bless her and wish her happiness. She was a strange mingling of fervency and folly, and, differently trained, might have grown into a charming woman.

I remained awake a long time that night; though my heart and brain were full of my own hopes—God help me!—I had no fears, for I was free, and laughed at the difficulties of the journey. Yet I felt a flood of sympathy for the little bride, and fancied how I could reason with and mould her. I prayed earnestly for her, and fell asleep while my thoughts were prayer. Poor Katerina!

When I awoke, the sun had finished his morning course—it was near noon. I had not inspected the room on the previous night, but by day-light I saw it was common, and coarsely furnished.

I used the small allowance of water, and felt refreshed, and dressed myself, still preserving the masquerade of the swollen face,

and not removing more than I could help of the brown colour which so disguised me. The house was perfectly still; my window looked into a sort of court-yard. There was a cat, apparently asleep, under a dilapidated archway, which evidently led to some domestic office; and I perceived some one watching pigeons who were cooing or drinking on the edge of a horse-trough. I opened my door, and wandered from one passage to another, until I found myself in a large rough kitchen, where a man and woman were eating what might have been a breakfast or a dinner.

I inquired for my companions. Both man and woman looked astonished; and then the woman told me that "my master and mistress had departed soon after sunrise."

"My *master and mistress!*" but fortunately I remained silent. "Of course," she continued, "you knew that you were to remain behind! The young lady cried very much,

and did so want to bid you good-bye before she went; but the gentleman would not let her—he almost forced her into the carriage. She was a pretty little thing, even in boy's clothes—and you must have loved her."

She asked had I been long in her service?

"Not long."

"Ah! she must have been a good catch, or the Count would not have had her. He had behaved very like a gentleman to them."

So I must sit down, and have some breakfast, and dinner too, if I liked—and stay all night—only the Count said I was in haste to get back to my own country, and her husband was to put me in the nearest road to the port.

I thanked her as well as I was able, and saw in a moment that it would be best for me to take the hint, and seem to be a servant anxious to return to England. At first I felt I had been shamefully deserted; but I was at liberty, and in a few brief days might be in England! The convent walls

were a protection: were they not also a prison? I endeavoured to play my part; but tears would force themselves down my cheeks—large, scalding tears.

"She cried as you do," said the woman, "but with greater noise."

"Is this," I at last inquired, "the Count's residence?"

"Oh, no; the residence of his friend, who is away. Ah, that Count is a very curious gentleman — very! I hope the young lady may be happy!—if you had aught to do in persuading her to leave her parents for him, you have much to answer for, young woman."

I assured her I knew nothing of it until the evening of her depature.

The old woman shook her head, and said that was not the way such matters were managed in her youth—then the waiting-maids arranged all the affairs of young lovers, and were rewarded accordingly.

It was evident that she did not at first

believe I was really ignorant of their former or future plans; and when, I suppose, my air of perfect truthfulness forced the conviction upon her that I did not know more than I acknowledged, she cast up her eyes, and drew down the corners of her mouth with an expression of bitter contempt. I told her after breakfast that I was without money.

"What! had they not paid me my wages?"

"They owed me nothing."

"Alas! how was I to get to England without money—such a country as it was for money! Such a journey! My mistress wanted to go to England; but the Count was too wise for that—he would not trust her among heretics; but he had taken her—she was not to tell where. How was I to go on without money?"

I showed her the ring I had shown Carlo. Her eyes gleamed and glittered over it. Then she exclaimed, her husband could sell it

for me; or, indeed, she would buy it herself; would I name the price?"

I demanded half what it had cost. "Oh, I raved! Such a sum for such a little thing." Then the husband was called into consultation—he had been a courier, and would know its exact value—they are a tribe of thieves, those couriers; but there are some honest men among them, and he was one. The ring, he said, was beyond her means, and well worth what I asked; and he had no doubt his friend the jeweller, at the village to which I must go, would give that for it. He would see to it, if the *signora* liked—he would accompany her at once. But the sum she would receive would not take her to England in the cheapest way. Had she no other jewels?

I told him I had a pair of ear-rings of as much value — perhaps more — (the woman had left the room when I made this communication) — and he said, "Very good, that will do. Do not show them to

my wife; gold and jewels glitter in her eyes, and bewilder her brain. A post leaves the village this evening to meet the great coach. As we go along I will give you instructions where and how you are to get your passport. Hush! When my wife — (she is, for all that, a good soul) — when she comes again, be sure you swear you have but the ring. She scents jewels, as a terrier scents rats, and never gets off the scent till she bags her game. Hush! she will invite you to stay, and be as sweet and mild as almonds; but trust her not! She can't help it, good soul, no more than a girl can help having sweethearts and fooling them. I see you are not what you seem; but that's naught to me. I have seen strange mysteries in my time, and believe in the duty of silence." His tongue never rested; but the old man was faithful and kind to me. "Go to your room, lady, and take up your hair more carefully, for

the golden hair and the brown skin do not belong to each other."

The false Count had promised me writing materials; but they had not been placed within my reach; if they had I should not have used them. I would be my own post — nothing, nothing, now between me and home — *home* and happiness! Never, never had I more palpitating heart, or wilder dream, than during the half-hour in which I girded myself for that journey home — to England — to Oswald! Twice the woman tapped at my door to know if I wanted anything — if I would stay and rest one day — I did not seem strong — I had better stay — could she help me?

I thought of her husband's words, and would not venture to remove the ear-rings from the other jewels that were concealed on my person, until I had fastened the coverlet as a curtain over the door — for I perceived very bright eyes peering through

the chinks. What a world of terrible brightness is in those Italian eyes!

The old courier, as I have said, was true and faithful; he disposed of my trinkets to his friend in the village, placing in my hand much more than I required for them. He calculated what my expenses ought to be, foresaw that at Marseilles I would change my dress, and recommended me to a respectable woman, who, as he said, understood and practised the virtues of silence and obedience. He refused to accept a coin for his trouble. "It gave him pleasure," he declared, "to have a touch now and then at his old trade: it kept life in him!" He gave me in charge to another friend of his — the conductor, who promised, in his turn, to make me over to the conductor of the "great coach." He whispered to me that I was well rid of "the Count," and that he would make an offering to the Virgin to induce her to protect the *poverina* he had married. With

the truest delicacy he avoided even insinuating a question; and when he waved his cap, and bowed, as the extraordinary mass of wood and cordage and noise, and every species of abomination and discomfort of which the old French, German, or Italian *voiture* was capable, staggered off, I felt I had parted from a friend.

It would be useless to recount the nothings which made up the remainder of my journey. I became each day more feverish and impatient; the delays and slowness of the travelling were terrible; it seemed as if all the world stood still. I watched the horses crawling up and stumbling down the steeps, and the chaunt or song — call it which you like — of the conductor, broken only by the crack of the driver's whip, was slow death to me. I longed to get out and walk, and once tried to do so with a monotonous sort of woman, who day and night cracked and ate walnuts; it was up-hill, and I soon

tired, and was glad to get into my corner again. Still, I endeavoured to console myself with the conviction that, slow as they were, every time those ponderous wheels revolved I was so much nearer England. *That* indeed was joy. Oh, how I counted their turnings after this thought had possession of my imagination. I believe they were all very kind to me. The monotonous woman had a child, a boy of about seven, and the conductor used to seat him on his shoulder, and tell him stories while he walked up the hills; but every time the child saw a wild flower he would insist on gathering it for me; he discovered that I liked them; and then he would rest his little pale face on my lap, and ask me to tell him stories. He is a pleasant memory, to-day; but as to a story —even if I had sufficiently understood the language to tell one,— I could easier have told his fate! The world, for me, had but one story!

The remembrance of the slowness of that journey seems even now to turn my blood to lead and still my pulse — it was dreadful; if I could have slept it would have relieved me — if I could have given my mind other cares, other thoughts! I tried to rest it on Maria, on the kindness of those poor nuns before they knew that I had any talent to serve their house — I tried to go back to my own childhood — I tried to divert my attention from the one engrossing thought by which I was overwhelmed; in vain!

Yes, even now I recall to very painful memory the mournful tardiness of that long and slow journey.

CHAPTER XVII.

I WAS in England! We had a sharp run across, and the packet swung, and heaved, and tossed even before a light breeze, as steamers do now in a heavy sea. Ill as I was, I would remain on deck: the English sailors, the English voices, the English boat, and tar, and sails, and ropes—all—all were taken into my heart. I clung to anything I could grasp that I might catch the first sight of the "white cliffs," so inexpressibly dear to the exile; yet, when we were almost inshore, I could not see them for the blinding tears — delicious tears of joy and gratitude. For the first time I really understood the mighty Providence, the pardoning mercy

and protection, that had saved me from myself.

I had often felt the sudden inspiration of religious enthusiasm; but the nearer we drew to England, the more did a holy and fervent gratitude to God elevate, and yet subdue, me.

The packet drew up suddenly, like a racehorse, alongside the Dover pier. I could have kissed the very stones I stood upon. I was in England: in a few hours I could be—I should be at home! HOME!

It was night. I did not go to the hotel where we had been together. I went to another; and power was mercifully given me to pray fervently, and to sleep—almost the untroubled sleep of childhood.

In the morning, when I looked in the glass, I felt my womanly vanity, or propriety—call it which you will—wounded: I could not appear in that dilapidated state before my husband. I was to leave Dover in two hours. Folding my veil over my

face, I went to a jeweller's, to dispose of my last trinket, except my bracelet, which, small as it was, I knew was worth all the rest. The jewel brought me several guineas. I made a few purchases—the first, a large cloak, sufficiently handsome; the last, a pair of boots. A bonnet and the cloak I put on—the boots I took in my hand to the hotel. They were "done up" in a piece of newspaper. In my haste I tore the paper off—for I was to leave Dover in half an hour—and threw it on the dressing-table. I so well remember brushing my hair, and wondering if Sir Oswald would recall how long it had once been; and even thinking — God help me! — how pretty the natural waves and curls looked, concealing, while adorning, my pale cheeks. I took up a fragment of the paper to fold round my comb, and my quick sight caught a paragraph: —

"We are able to state, on the best authority, that as Mr. Hobert finds it necessary, in consequence of

the impaired state of his health requiring a perfect cessation from the duties of public life, to resign his seat in the House of Commons, Sir Oswald Harvey has yielded to the wishes of his friends, and commenced an animated canvass of his native county."

It was a paper of only yesterday. O joy unspeakable! He was at Brecken Hall, with health and spirit to enter into public life! I should hear him speak in his country's senate — I should see him quoted — his eloquence would penetrate all hearts — his learning — his power of grasping and elucidating every subject, would be felt and acknowledged throughout England — he would be *the* man of his time! I read and re-read the paragraph on that soiled and crumpled scrap of paper: it seemed to me printed in letters of bright gold. Oh! was it real! — was I truly *his* wife — the mother of *his* child who would soon be born into the world to the inheritance of his name — his virtues? My unborn child! — his child and mine!

I have since heard mothers say, that if the painful choice were placed before them — the husband or the child — to forsake one of the two — they would cleave to the child. It was not so with me: *I* would cleave to my husband. I felt all along that I must do justice to my child; but the first object of my life — my great triumph — was that I should fasten my husband's heart to me by the gift of this infant, and make him rejoice as he had never rejoiced before.

The high-mettled steeds trotted forth in the clear sunlight, and the coach was to me as a chariot drawn by winged angels. The clear call of the guard's horn was as the sound of a trumpet — the cheerful English tongue rang in my ears. The coach went to a small town, just eighteen miles from Brecken Hall: the guard told me I should easily get horses on. How the rivers glittered and the fields glowed in their fresh and

amazing beauty! As we flew past, the hedge-rows seemed, to eyes accustomed to the faded hues of France, as if robed in velvet. The oaks of England, so firm-set and wide-spreading! The woods, surrounding the stately mansion, skirting the broad meadows and sweeping lawns! The enclosures — such things of strength and neatness! The delicious cottages, embosomed in foliage and fragrance, honeysuckles, and roses, and clematis entwining each the other; while the tiny gardens were models of careful keeping! Where in all the world can we match our English cottages — or their masters? — the round, fresh beauty of their young matrons, and of their rosy lipped, curly-headed Saxon children? Truly, I had never seen England before — truly, I had never loved it — never taken the same pride in it, that I did during that journey. Another group of those Saxon creatures, all roses and blonde hair. My son should have dark hair, like his father.

I felt him beating against my heart as this thought passed through my rejoicing brain. Oh, what a drive that was! I could hardly contain myself. I longed — I panted — to shout out my joy, "England and home! Home and England!" No cloud came between me and my sun. I was all hope —all delight—all triumph: I knew so well how my husband had grieved that he was childless. I remembered his once saying that he thought I was worthy to train children, and I knew how highly he rated those who had that great gift. I had no fear *now* of HER: he would cherish, ay, and love, the mother of his child. I was too happy! At last the coach stopped, after a drive of five hours — that was all. I asked for a post-chaise and horses on to Brecken: I would not say Brecken Hall, but contented myself by naming the village. The landlord shook his head. "He had received orders that morning to keep his horses for Sir Oswald Harvey. Sir Oswald

was canvassing the county, and intended to change horses at his house, and go on to Synge."

"When was Sir Oswald expected?"

"Oh, he could not tell the moment Sir Oswald might arrive."

He bowed me into a pretty little parlour that formed a sort of ante-room to two bed-rooms, with snow-white draperies and quilts; and I remember the blue flowers of lavender strown over the beds.

The suddenness of this meeting overwhelmed me. I had parted with him at an inn! Were we to meet again at an inn? What matter? We should meet. I said "Yes," mechanically, to the dinner question; and when I was asked to name what I would choose—in reply, I suppose, to the catalogue of bacon and eggs, and chops, and trout—lovely trout—I answered "water." I believe they thought I was fainting, for they brought me wine and water; and I recall the *mooney* face of

the fat landlady, while she endeavoured to bend over me, and unfasten my bonnet, murmuring—"Sweet lady—pretty creetur." I was soon refreshed, for I had to nerve myself for this meeting; but I was all joy—all!—all certainty and joy! My eyes overflowed with joy—my heart beat with joy—joy thrilled through my veins, my pulses galloped with joy!

"The journey has been too much for you, madam," said the landlady, in the soft tone of stout sympathy. "I could not take a journey myself in your state; but I am a poor, nervous creetur."

I laughed hysterically.

"I hope Sir Oswald may alight," she said. "I assure you he is a handsome gentleman, and will be a credit to the county: not like the poor man who is gone—such a lean, withered little gentleman, that hadn't the heart to order even post-horses, or give more than sixpence to a post-boy. Sir Oswald, madam, is every

inch a gentleman. His colour will be true blue. You see it there," she continued, pointing to a broad blue riband that was run in and out of the flowery ornaments of the little pier-glass. "I should so like Sir Oswald to see it."

"Then, pray, when he comes," I said eagerly, "show him in here. I will step into that bed-room, and he need not know the room is occupied."

The landlady made me such a reverential curtsey.

"You are a real gentlewoman," she said; "and I *am* so humbly grateful. I *should* like Sir Oswald to see our independent principles in the riband: true blue never fades. My father shook hands with Mr. Fox—'Charley Fox' he always called him; so it does me good to put up the bit of blue."

I removed my bonnet and cloak into the little bedroom, the window of which com-

manded a view of the street—or rather, road.

"Pray do not say that any one is here."

"So kind of you, madam—so much obliged: the riband, sure, does look pretty: it would be almost a pity he should not see it. He is such a handsome gentleman—and they say so very, very clever—such a headpiece! Oh, he *is* a gentleman, and has done strange things, maybe you have heard? But it's not for me to speak. If he had married me, as the saying is, what is that to anybody?"

She certainly was the fattest specimen of feminine humanity I had ever seen; and during this talk she continued rolling about, moving a chair, dusting a table, peeping at herself in the looking-glass, and glancing with undisguised triumph at the broad blue riband.

"And, madam—our parson, he says Sir Oswald makes the most beautifulest speeches ever heard, except from a Par-

liament gentleman, and has such sweet ways with him: they say he could have married the first princesses in all the countries he was ever in: and I'm sure I commend their taste. I don't wonder at it. I am sure the foreign gentlemen I see are like yellow mummies—not an ounce of flesh on them from top to toe: I never believe there is a drop of blood in their bodies. But he *is* such a noble-looking gentleman, no one could blame him for doing as he did; for I say, if a rich gentleman, and a handsome gentleman, and a gentleman with as much learning as the bench of bishops, can't do as he pleases, who can? Just see, madam—there's quite a mob gathered; but oh, the double-facedness of some! There's Mistress Jenny Crummels, of the Crab-Tree, has taken off her orange riband and put on a blue. If that's not political dishonesty, I don't know what is."

Strange it seems to me, that, with my soul

so full of *him*, and my eyes watching to catch the first cloud of dust that floated to indicate his approach, every word that poor fat woman uttered was graven on my memory. I suppose it was because she praised him. At last there was a movement among the assembled villagers—leaving the road vacant, and crushing each other on the side-paths. It was not a great crowd, but it increased rapidly. The opposite dwellings —some larger than others—opened their windows, and age and youth alike looked forth to obtain sight of him of whom they had often heard, and who was to be the "popular member." The old ladies had broad blue ribands round their heads knotted into great bows in front, and the girls managed to introduce "a bit of blue" somewhere—in a breast-knot, or floating from their hair. I drank in all that at a glance. The inn was at one side of a rude triangle, forming what they called a Square; and in the midst of this flourished a great

oak. It was alive with boys, who, always rejoicing in noise, tossed and waved their caps, long before the heads of the leaders came in sight. The parish beadle poked at them with a long pole, and I hated him: why should not the boys shout "Long live Sir Oswald?" I wanted to hear them. I shut the bed-room door; one of the panels was split—a division of at least half an inch. I could see distinctly into the sitting-room. I was glad of it.

There is always noise before an expected noise arrives—the noise that calls "Silence!" and "Hush!"—which in "rustles" and "whispers," prepares for the great outburst—the grand, deep-chested English shout—the animal thunder of a people.

I clutched the window-curtain, for I heard several cry "Now!" and "Here he comes!" and the landlord and landlady had taken their places at each side of the low-browed porch, like grotesque Caryatides; and I heard several of the women

say, "God bless him!" and then came the firm rattling trot of the horses and the roll of the britchska; and then——and then—while I hung back—panting, yet clinging to the curtain, drinking in *all*—I saw HIM —my husband—his hat off—his noble head bowing to the villagers. Never, never had he looked so glorious. Never!

My husband! But what—*who*—who is that on the other side, in *my* place? She bends also; for the fools have cried—"Long live Sir Oswald and Lady Harvey!"

"No, no," I exclaimed frantically. "I —I am his wife—not Caroline Mansfeld!" No one heard me, for the air was full of strong voices, shouting again and again, "Long live Sir Oswald and Lady Harvey!" For some moments my eyes were fixed—I could not close them to shut out the vision —so cruel, yet so dazzling in its beauty—she all smiles and radiance, while he turned on her such looks of happiness and love. I could not shut my eyes. Gradually

the outlines seemed traced in blood, and the voices croaked in my ears. I staggered to seek the door, and could not find it; the ceiling was crushing down upon my brain. I was more mad at that moment than I had been when determined to free him by my death that he might do—what he had done. I was as blind as if my eyes had been scathed by lightning.

They were together in the outer room.

I *heard*, and *felt*, though I could not see. He called her "dearest blessing," "his treasure," and pressed her to take refreshment. I heard the kiss upon her hand, or brow, or lips — no matter which. Oh, how I had overtasked my strength; I was there crouched up, gathered into a heap upon the floor—*his wife*, with his babe underneath my bosom — another in my place, and therein honoured and beloved.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHAT blessings are those stolid, commonplace people, who do everything you require without question or inquiry! I was again in a state of unconsciousness, at the mercy of strangers — of the fat landlady and her husband. Had they been inquisitive, "sharp" people, my secret would have been guessed in some way or other; but while they took care of me, it was marvellous how little they cared who or what I was. The landlady almost suffocated me with burnt feathers and brandy; and I believe I should have become conscious much sooner but for the perseverance with which she fumigated the room, after her own fashion. The village Doctor relieved

my dormant senses from this persecution, though before I could speak or see, I was conscious of her commentaries upon my "deadly swound," which ran on thus—"Poor dear lady! and she in such haste to get on to Brecken, which she can't see to-night, poor creetur! nor may-be to-morrow. What do you think, Doctor? Well nothing beats burnt feathers. Though you disallow it, Doctor, Sir, I'm sure I'd have burnt a whole feather-bed sooner than not have her come to. Do I know where she comes from? No, Sir; she came in the Dover coach. Luggage? No, Sir; only a foreign basket. Who she be going to? Can't tell; no business of mine. I never asks nuthin', so I can't tell nuthin'. Never was called in question since I was born—never; and never can be. She nearly 'swounded' when she arrived. I saw she was taken poorly; but of course when Sir Oswald and his bride come, I never thought more about her, 'specially as she could not

have the horses until may-be midnight; and the girl brought in the dinner and knocked at the bedroom, and all; and when candle-time come and I prepared as beautiful a pair of sixes as ever entered my candlesticks, and walked in with 'em, I saw the dinner had never been touched. Now whenever men or beasts are off their feed, I know there's something wrong; and as I could not move the door, I threw up the bed-room window, and got my head in, and there, sure enough she was—just a heap of clothes in a corner. Oh, it *was* a swound! I was quite an hour trying the burnt feathers and brandy, and slapping her hands until mine ached; and all of no use; and then sent for you, Doctor. I assure you every feather of two goslings and a goose did I burn in the dust-shovel."

"I dare say you did, Mrs. Mouldsey. If I had not arrived in time she might have been suffocated, and then there would have been a coroner's inquest, aud you might have been tried for manslaughter."

The poor woman shuffled out of the room. I felt relief from a hot presence. I could breathe; but though perfectly sensible of what was passing, I had only retained the consciousness of a sudden and great trial, without power to define what that trial was. My memory kept diving into itself, and finding nothing. A current of soft air passed over my face. I imagined, rather than saw, a kind greyish old man bending over me, and fanning me with a goose's wing, rescued, no doubt, from the burning. Then I endeavoured to keep my eyes open, and with that endeavour returned, sudden and bright, and dangerous as the lightning's flash, perfect remembrance of the hour past.

"We are better now," said the old Doctor; "and yet our pulse has quickened. Have we any idea of what produced this long prostration?"

I turned my face away. I fancied my fate was written upon it.

"Ah well; we won't tell—perhaps we

cannot. Poor young lady!" He raised my left hand in a peculiar way, and looked at it for a moment. I saw he was looking for the wedding ring; it was there.

"We *must* keep perfectly quiet for a day or two," he said, softly, "per—fect—ly quiet! If we do not, more than one dear life may pay for it. But is there no one we would like to write to?"

I shook my head.

"No ONE?"

"No one," I murmured.

"Then we must get well ourselves, by ourselves. We will send a little draught to secure a tranquil night."

My blood rushed about wildly at that word "tranquil."

Again he felt my pulse, and brought a candle close to my eyes. He looked in my face so sweetly; and, bending over me, whispered, "I know not what causes this abrupt pulse! but I should say to it—Patience, and the draught!"

"Doctor," I replied, "you are very kind; but I can do without the draught. I may not be able to pay you!"

"Soh—so; but we will be paid. So many pay us in the same coin—recovery! We shall take the draught, and in the morning we shall be paid."

The kind old soul put his finger on his lips and retreated, nodding his head until he got to the door, when he made the deliberate bow of the old Court.

I heard whisperings outside: he was giving instructions to the landlady. Again he came.

"Young lady we do not deem it right that we should be left alone to-night; so some one will sit up with us."

Thinking only of the one watcher, I told him, that if the landlady remained in the room I should be suffocated.

"Ay, ay; we won't have Mrs. Mouldsey this time. We will send you a pink, my dear— a perfect pink! And you will take

the draught: it is the best *we* can give you." He advanced close to the bed, and, spreading out his fingers like a fan, joined them at the tips, and said in a low tone, while he opened and shut them, touching the tips each time, "THE GREAT PHYSICIAN, though, gives a better prescription. I know what it is, but I cannot make you take that—so much faith and hope, mixed with prayer and patience, taken whenever the pain returns." (A flood of sympathy poured from the good man's eyes into mine). "Whatever your cross may be (and that little pulse of yours has fluttered out the truth to Benjamin Ridge), the Saviour's was harder to carry. God bless you, poor child: remember the *Great Physician's* prescription. But we hope to find you asleep, or just waking, in the morning. If you have no father *here*, or any one near or dear to pray for you, *we* will not forget to do so. Patience and quiet, dear—quiet and patience—and faith, dear!"

He glided from the room, and it seemed as if my little light was extinguished.

I cannot tell you what I thought, or how I suffered. You will weary with this record of "thoughts and sensations." My first were to go the next day direct to Brecken Hall, and see Sir Oswald. But had I not vowed to sacrifice myself to procure his happiness? And was not that vow accomplished? Would his love for the unborn be greater than his love for HER?—would he not curse me, as the deceiver and the destroyer? Why not have trusted in God, who works all for good to those who love HIM. But did I *love Him?* After the word; not, alas! after the spirit. I saw that Sir Oswald was happy. I could not be deceived, knowing every shade of the expression of that dear face; I saw a whole heaven of happiness there. *He* had not sinned. I thanked God fervently for *that;* for God was just; and, knowing ALL, would punish *me*—

not him. In all my agony that was joy. Nor had she sinned; if she continued to make him happy, I could suffer for her also. I began to question myself, if I should be willing, in my flesh, and in my soul, to bear the punishment here and hereafter due unto such a sin as mine. I could pass through a living fire here, and endure whatever my punishment should be hereafter, and be the gainer,—were *he* but happy. You think this impious? So I do—NOW. Had I not considered all this when saved from the burning inn? Had I not, after what I saw through the glowing flames, pictured their happiness as the result of my sacrifice? and had I not witnessed the accomplishment of my wishes? But this was not all. Mine had become a divided duty, and I must reconcile,—or sacrifice! I could not reason, or question further; and, at the moment, the good doctor's "Pink," in the form of a small, spare woman, with a quantity of flouncing, stand-

ing out like a glory round her face, crept into the room; and with a smiling lip—withered but smiling—administered the promised draught, smoothed and arranged my pillows and bed, and sat behind the curtain twirling silent straws—she was plaiting.

Occasionally she peeped round the curtain,—she might have been a shadow for any noise she made, poor thing!—so meek and watchful. But I was not able to watch her long—I got to other worlds. Was it dream, or delirium? Or has the spirit in death's anticipation power to forsake its earthly tabernacle, and wander within this sphere, or into other spheres, mingling with emancipated souls, and gifted with a foreshadowing of what is to be hereafter? The apostle believed this spirit-wandering to be a true thing; for he states what he saw—whether in the spirit he could not tell—or whether out of the spirit he could not tell. "The immortality that

dwells within us" never "slumbers or sleeps." We know whence it comes, we cannot tell whither it goes. We may think and pray, but our earthly perceptions are either darkened or dazzled; when the time comes for us to see "face to face," we shall know "even as we are known."

I suppose my so-called sleep was long; and towards morning "heavy;" for when I awoke, through the apertures of the closed shutters of my little room came narrow strips of sunbeam, streaking the green carpet with light, and weaving silver nets upon the wall—"the Pink" hovered over me, and inquired how I felt.

"How did I feel?" I could not tell; the hour of my trial had come—come before the appointed time. The hour so full of hope—so full of terror—so longed for—so dreaded; that hour which gives to woman the glorious crown of maternity—that diadem of dignity, bestowing a sovereignty which she would not, even in

her pangs, exchange for a kingdom—a life —a fragment of God's own life—for her to cherish and prepare for time and for immortality! Well may her own life be risked to secure a life-long happiness, perfected by that onward pilgrimage, which is never, to the good, so triumphant as at its close.

I had intervals from pain, during which I heard the soothing voice of the old Doctor.

"We are very patient; it will soon, by God's help rather than mine, come right; it surely will. I had rather it had not come so soon; but still, the time is God's time! All time is His." I often thought of his words in after life——but enough of this. "A man child!"—that double glory of the Old Testament world—was on my bosom; a little tender thing who had entered earth, they thought, a month too soon; the unspoken prayers and praise of those first moments cannot be described or comprehended by those who have not

felt the pangs, or gloried, as if heaven were opened before them, in their result. I remember so well the violet-powder on that delicate pink skin, so folded and wrinkled, and so warm and soft; the veil above the pulsating brain; the tiny crumpled fingers. Oh, how at once my life seemed wrapt in the flickering life of that two-hours'-old infant — Mine! — mine! My very soul in earnestness of prayer went up in supplication that I might be gifted with what was good, for its dear sake. I prayed, as I had never prayed before, that it might live and grow in God's righteousness and man's honour.

I heard the fat landlady inquire of my good Doctor, if ever in his practice he had seen such a skinny child — and he hushed her into silence — but I had no idea that she meant *my child!*

The same evening the old man asked me, if I did not wish a letter written to some one.

I answered "No."

"No one?" he replied with a sigh. "Poor child—no one!"

I had not thought the babe would have come so soon; but yet I had been tempted the previous day, at Dover, to purchase a few things—those little scraps of clothing that mothers delight mysteriously to fashion within their rooms. But my aged friend brought me a present of gay, though old-fashioned, robing, trimmed with dainty lace. You have seen the cap and robe, Mary, and wondered at its beauty; a prince could have no better—and I was a good judge of needlework. Dear, kind old man! His wife and children—all were gone; and these, I suppose, had been his lost wife's pride. It pleased God that I "got over my trouble," as he called it, rapidly. The "Pink" talked to me in her soft voiec, which sounded like the cooing of a dove, of the small things that came within her sphere, and set me sometimes thinking

what pure happiness can live within a small circle. If ever woman was simply happy it was the "Pink!" But Sir Oswald Harvey was her chief topic, because, just then, the eyes of all the village world were fixed on him. Before the expiration of a week, she had smoothed and arranged my hair, and set me up in bed "like a queen," and given me some linen to see if I was, as she called it, "blythe to work;" and the sleeping child seemed growing each moment my eyes returned upon it. Seated by the window, she told me she would tell me all about Sir Oswald; for it was, the Doctor said, fit to make a novel; and all, she knew, was true. Sir Oswald was at last wed to the lady of his love; he had married, in an hour of anger, a village girl of Brecken, hard by the Hall; a beautiful, proud girl they called her—a schoolmaster's daughter, nothing more.

"She herself had seen the father once, a homely man as ever she would wish to see,

but something overdone with learning; and Sir Oswald had married his daughter, though all the time his heart was with his first and only love; and after the marriage he was a long time mad—no wonder, poor gentleman, to think what he had done! and the poor deserted young lady was as mad as he was,—but he got better, and went, after a bit, into foreign countries, and wasted and pined,—a noble gentleman, true to his low-born wife, though it could hardly be expected,—but Sir Oswald was a loyal gentleman! They said, he had a deal to put up with at first, from his wife's low ways, and yet she grew into a lady—wonderful! and his valet (Sir Oswald's valet) came once lately to her master's, and would not have a word said against her; nor hardly own it was a blessing when she died—which it certainly was; nor could we rightly get the truth out of him how she died,—for some said it was conscience, and that she took poison;

others that she drowned herself; but as she was Christian brought up, and must have known there is no time to repent of *that* crime, I can't believe she did *that*, even in a Popish country;—any way she was dead; and a good job too," added the "Pink," with evident satisfaction, "for it restored Sir Oswald to life,—in three months after he was as much himself as if he had never, as my master said, eagle though he was, mated with a barn-door fowl,—and in six he was married! — that's hardly a month past,—it was hurried on, because of the election,—and to be sure such a pair had not been seen in the county for many a day — she had such a spirit! It was said the schoolmaster's daughter (I forget her name) was very artful and had trapped him, so while Sir Oswald's man was waiting for a certificate the Doctor had to give him, I asked him about it, and the old fellow shook like an angry lion, and denied it straight, and said she was above all that

— that she had no thought, an hour before she was his wife, of marrying Sir Oswald! (sure he ought to know!) and that he never would believe she drowned herself, because he never—(and the conceited old fellow boasted that he had good observation and experience too),— never, abroad or at home, knew a woman worship a man as that beautiful lady worshipped his master. He gave in, however, that if she had not died, his master might not have lived, particularly after meeting Miss Mansfeld, and finding that she loved him, as he loved her. So it was, as I said, a good job that the first wife died, to make room for the second —who had his heart; and I hear, that up the country they have made a ballad of it!"

"A ballad of it?"

I gathered strength to say it was a strange story; and she volunteered to get me the ballad, with its happy ending, of how the lovers were united.

I asked if the Doctor had ever seen the schoolmaster's daughter?

"No, she had heard him say, not since she was a child. Brecken was off his beat; and the very day Sir Oswald married her, they left that part of the world; *he* pitied the first lady, and was glad the old man had died before he heard of her death."

In an agony I asked—"What old man?"

"The old schoolmaster. He was found dead in his bed, smiling like a sleeping child, the morning before the news came that Lady Oswald was gone also."

I did not scream, nor faint. I was shocked beyond the power to speak or move. I was overwhelmed by this fresh desolation. My good, true-hearted, simple-minded father—my childhood's guard and friend! At any other time I should have suffered more bitterly, though this bitterness was hard to bear; but I had endured so much, and was so bound to endurance, that, even in my first hour of weeping, I

felt thankful that God in His great mercy had spared my poor father the anguish he would have suffered had he lived to know my supposed fate. I bowed my head over my child, and told my little nurse I wanted sleep. I suppose my voice had become changed. She would have it I had sat up too long, and brought me some restorative. At last I was left alone with my blessing and my tears!

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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